

# MODERN TOBACCO GROWER

September 2009

Welcome to MODERN TOBACCO GROWER, an email newsletter covering the tobacco industry from the leaf producers' side. Please subscribe (if you haven't already) by emailing me at [Chrisbickers@gmail.com](mailto:Chrisbickers@gmail.com). Write "Subscribe" and include what type of tobacco you grow (if any) and your name and mailing address. Or call 919 / 789-4631. We will be back in about a month. Till then, good luck in the field. And thanks once again to our sponsor, Fair Products Inc.

Chris Bickers, Editor

**When the US Department of Agriculture** issued its September Crop Report earlier this month, it projected bigger crops than last year for flue-cured and burley but smaller ones for most other tobaccos. Among the individual types:

*Flue-cured*--Production was projected by USDA at 506 million pounds, 1% above last year. Acreage was projected at 219,500, 2% below last year, with yields averaging 2,305 pounds per acre, up 66 pounds from 2008. Much of the increase is coming from North Carolina, especially the east (as in the photo above, showing barn loading near Salemburg NC). And much of it came in the last 30 days. USDA projected NC flue-cured yields at 2,400 pounds per acre, up 2% from the agency's August forecast. In Virginia, the projected production of 39 million pounds was about the same as a month earlier, while in South Carolina, the 40 million pound projection was down 5%. Georgia's projection dropped drastically between August and September, to 21 million pounds, with a yield of 1,500 pounds 5per acre. *Burley*--A total of 213 million pounds was projected, 6% above last year, on the second lowest harvested acreage on record--98,800 acres, 1% above 2008 (which was the lowest). Yields are expected to average 2,160 pounds per acre, 93 pounds above a year ago. *Dark fire-cured*--A total of 54.5 million pounds was projected, 12% below 2008, on 11% fewer acres. Yield is projected at 3,293 pounds per acre, down 51 pounds from last year. *Dark air-cured*--This type took the biggest hit compared to last year, with production expected to fall to 18.7 million pounds, 26% below 2008, even though yields are expected to be up 3%. Acreage was way down after a big year in 2008. *Cigar tobacco*--Production is expected to reach 7.65 million pounds, 9% below last year, with harvested acreage down 19%. *Southern Maryland*--Production is expected to total 4.73 million pounds, 25% above 2.008. *All types*--Production is expected to total 805 million pounds, slightly above 2008.

**The NC flue-cured crop has the potential** to be one of the best ever, says W.K. Collins, NC tobacco agronomist. "There are a few exceptions in the western part of the state, but it appears to me that we are heading toward a great crop. So far, it has been spared any hurricane type weather of the sort that often occurs in September. It is slightly delayed but I don't think it is nearly as late as the 2008 crop. It has good color and seems to be ripening up well." Loren Fisher, NC Extension crop specialist, says the Eastern NC crop is not late in development, but the flue-cured harvest is being delayed because of shortages of barn space. Old Belt flue-cured, on the other hand, is late in ripening because of dry weather, he says. An early frost or freeze could create problems, he says.

**The state of Florida** is not included in the USDA Crop Report. But *Modern Tobacco Grower* has learned from J. Michael Moore, the tobacco specialist in neighboring Georgia, that Florida will have a much higher yield than Georgia, about 2,700 pounds per acre. If realized, that will in all likelihood be the highest among the flue-cured states this season. With harvested acreage of 1,000 to 1,100 acres, Moore estimates total production at just under three million pounds. Harvest was complete by September 15, and curing is expected to end soon if it hasn't already. To the north, Georgia flue-cured was fully a month behind its normal schedule, and a substantial amount remained to be harvested as of September 15. Very heavy and constant rains before and after transplanting followed by extremely hot conditions got the crop off to a bad start from which it never fully recovered. About 15,000 acres were originally planted but that area has dwindled to only 13,000 acres due to losses from excessive early rains and tomato spotted wilt virus. But the USDA projection may be too bleak: Moore expects a yield of 1,700 pounds per acre, much lower than average but higher than USDA's estimate, and production at just over 22 million pounds.

**A hot water curing system fired by wood chips** showed good potential in testing on the campus of North Carolina State University this summer. "It is very economical," says Mike Boyette, NC Extension engineer who adapted the system from a commercially available unit. "We have data to show we can cure a barn of flue-cured tobacco for \$60 to \$70 worth of wood chips. And availability of wood chips shouldn't be a problem for anyone: They can be found anywhere tobacco is grown in North Carolina." The system should also keep TSNAs very low. "There is no opportunity for any products of combustion to get into the barn," he says. Very limited maintenance is required. You only have to fill the bin once a day (shown in photo). It could also be used to heat greenhouses. "In fact, it could be

used to provide economical space heating of any kind," Boyette says. The wood chip heater will be on demonstration at a yet-to-be chosen research station next year. For more information at [mike\\_boyette@ncsu.edu](mailto:mike_boyette@ncsu.edu) or 919 515 6790.

**OTAC, the new contact sucker control agent** that is approved for use in organic programs, performed well this season for Charles Rose of Nashville NC, who used it in a PRC program. "It was definitely effective," the flue-cured grower says. "It did at least as good as the alternative and maybe better. We would use it again." In Extension testing in NC, the results from OTAC were similar to other sucker control products, says Loren Fisher, NC Extension tobacco specialist. "It doesn't appear that a farmer would lose any control by using it. OTAC looks like a good fit in organic or PRC tobacco or in any program where you are trying to reduce or eliminate the use of MH." OTAC is manufactured by Fair Products Inc., the sponsor of Modern Tobacco Grower.

**If you have to spray for flea beetles late in the season,** be sure to observe the insecticide's preharvest interval, says Hannah Burrack, NC Extension entomologist. "If you think your tobacco needs treatment very late, think about choosing the chemical with the shortest interval practical," she says. Otherwise, there may not be enough time for the insecticide to dissipate. "The last thing growers want right now is to develop another residue problem," she says.

**Burley is no more or less susceptible** to insects in the Coastal Plain than flue-cured, Burrack says. One possible exception: Burley gets more heavily infested with tomato spotted wilt virus. That may signify increased susceptibility to the thrips that carry it. But there could be other reasons, says Burrack. For instance, burley has a yellower color. "That has been shown to be more attractive to thrips."

**Despite a record cold summer,** Ontario growers will probably produce a normal yield, or close to it. "It will be a little on the light side, but the quality I have seen looks very good," says Dan Van Hooren of the Canadian Tobacco Research Foundation. "Considering the weather conditions we had this season, I would say this crop is not too bad at all."