

Tobacco must change with the times

By Chip Miller
Of The Carlisle Mercury Staff
Kentuckians can easily claim tobacco as their heritage.

They can also claim it as being their life's blood.

Kentucky is the largest grower of burley tobacco in the nation.

Nicholas County is the 27th producer ranked in the counties of Kentucky.

"Tobacco has traditionally been the number one cash crop in our county," said Michael Phillips, County Extension Agent for Agriculture.

"Tobacco has traditionally paid for farms. It has been the major means of people's livelihood," he said.

The cash crop, particularly burley, touches the lives of every Kentuckian.

Nicholas County produced 3,360,000 pounds of tobacco last year, according to the Kentucky Agricultural Station handbook.

"I think we probably best that situated by a little bit," said Phillips.

He did say for Nicholas County to good position of tobacco production.

But, as for the past, the tobacco industry has seen some unsettling circumstances evolve from a decline in sales.

And the economy of tobacco-producing states has suffered.

"The surplus built up and the over-

supply limited the price," he explained.

"I think the tobacco industry will continue to be an economically significant crop in Kentucky and Nicholas County," he said.

But the industry will need to change, according to Phillips.

"Too many people are working today's crops with too many of yesterday's ideas."

He said the industry needs to change as a whole.

"Right now the industry is in a transition period," he said.

He said the foreign markets are opening up to the industry and these will play a major role in years to come.

"That's where the future exists for the tobacco industry in America," he said.

Phillips stressed new developments in trade with Japan and China.

He also attributed the price support system the government imposed as a good idea in the beginning but a problem hampering the industry today.

Phillips said some of the tobacco producers have dropped out of the market. Many, he explained, have had to take supplementary jobs or have depended upon other agricultural crops or livestock to relieve the frustrating burden of the tobacco market.

"Tobacco cannot pull the load that it once did," Phillips said of the dependency of producers on the cash crop.

"We're going to have to diversify a little more," he said. He said producers are relying on the crop too frequently.

"We (Nicholas County) have dropped 2.2 million pounds in our cash crops since 1982. The greatest portion of these cash crops has been tobacco," he said.

"This can be associated back to the reduction in price of tobacco," Phillips added.

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Burley Auction to open November 23 for 15 sale days before holiday break

The Burley Auction Warehouse Association has decided that 1987 sales of burley tobacco will begin across the eight-state burley belt on November 23, according to Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner David E. Boswell.

Auctions will carry on for three days up through Wednesday, November 25, whereupon a Thanksgiving break will be observed until Monday, November 30.

Sales will then restart on Monday, November 30 and hold away on a Monday through Thursday, four day week basis through Thursday, December 17.

The Christmas holiday break will then be observed with post-holiday sales beginning on Monday, January 4.

Boswell says auctions will then be held at the four-day week pace throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, and Missouri until the burley on hand is sold.

are "making inroads for the tobacco industry" because of their growing demand for American quality tobacco.

Which might not last for long, according to Phillips.

"In the past our quality (tobacco) was so much better than the competition. Each year the foreign countries compete, they get closer and closer to our product," he said. He explained their technological advancements in production have permitted them to grow higher quality tobacco than ever before.

"The only place we (tobacco industry) are enjoying growth right now in the market is overseas," he said.

"The world market is the hope of the future," he added of the tobacco industry.

As for the burley industry of tomorrow?

"People need to become as efficient as possible. Efficiency will make you or break you in the coming years," he said.

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Meantime, the USDA has established a report of last year's \$148.80 support price for the 1987-88 sales.