

The Burley Season 1988 Page 4

Quality of tobacco better

RALEIGH (AP)—The quality of this year's tobacco was better, prices were higher and only a small percentage went under loan, and those—combined with tobacco reforms—make the short-term future for the crop look good, experts said.

"My assessment, if you look at the tobacco situation over next five years, is very positive," said Mitch Smith of the Pitt County Agricultural Extension Service. "At least for the immediate future, most people seem very optimistic."

But Smith said he was cautious about what the long term holds for North Carolina's top commodity. "Tobacco has always been controversial," Smith said. "And we already recognize that we are essentially producing for the export market. There are a lot of factors that could affect that."

Nonetheless, the 1988 crop will be remembered because it was good

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tobacco that brought good prices, agriculture experts said.

"I think we did come up with one of the vintage crops of tobacco across the state as a whole," Carlton Blalock of the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina said in a recent interview. "The Eastern Belt, in particular, had a good crop, as did the Old Belt, except for some late crops that got hit by frost. Overall, though, this is one of the better crops we have grown in this state in many years."

The quality of the crop, Blalock said, was reflected in the prices, which were generally higher than 1987, and in the small amount of leaf taken under the government support program.

"In my opinion, it's been a successful season when you look at the amount of tobacco moving into the channels of trade," said Regie Lester of the Tobacco Growers Information Committee. "Very little of the crop had gone into the blue-rued cooperative—less than 2 percent for the year across all the belts. That means 98 percent of the crop moved into the channels of trade."

With a quota increase this year, growers are selling "7, 8, maybe 9 percent more than they did last year," Blalock said.

The tobacco sales, combined with record-high soybean prices caused by drought in the Midwest should mean a profitable year for growers, he said.

"It will be one of the better years for our farmers in a long time," he said. "And that means a better year for a lot of other businesses. Farming has a big economic impact in this state."

The weather during the growing season was "almost ideal, particularly in the east," Blalock said.

"We were fortunate to be strate-

gically located for the rainfall," Smith said. "Rainfall is the single most important factor in any tobacco crop."

"When the market opened, everyone was talking about the adverse weather conditions in other areas," Smith said. "But our crops really did well. We got the rain when we needed it, for the most part."

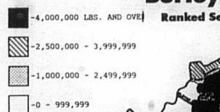
Lester said changes in the tobacco program two years ago to reduce the stockpiles of leaf held by the Fine-Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corp. apparently have worked to stabilize the market.

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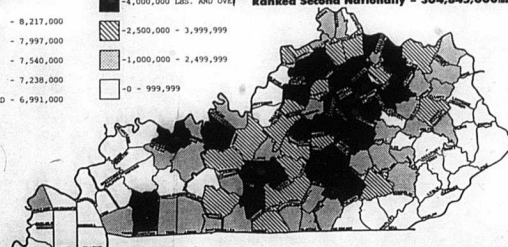
CROP OF 1987

TOP FIVE COUNTIES (LBS.)

1. BARREN - 8,217,000
2. BOURBON - 7,997,000
3. FAYETTE - 7,540,000
4. SHELBY - 7,238,000
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