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Standing amid the start of 65 acre farm, Mike Sexton's experiment with flotation farming the year tobacco labor and a desire to have more control over the growth of his tobacco, Sexton risk is quite small, he believes wholeheartedly in the system.

## Sexton risks tobacco crop on flotation system

**By Josh Shephard**  
The Carlisle Mercury/John Shephard Photo

**CARLISLE**—The flotation farming system for raising tobacco crops has only recently trickled into Nicholas County.

However, if one Nicholas County farmer is successful in germinating all 65 acres of his tobacco crop with the flotation system, the transition from traditional tobacco beds to flotation farming could come a great deal quicker.

Mike Sexton, along with a few other local county farmers, has been experimenting with the transition from tobacco beds to the flotation system over the past three years.

In the last two years, he committed only a fraction of his crop to the flotation system with noticeably good results. But, in those years, most of his plants had already been germinated and sprouted by a company out of the south whose specialty is the flotation system.

The system is originally a two step process. The first is the initial seed germination, which has usually been a service provided by tobacco companies. The next stage involves plugging each tiny sheet into a larger bank of Styrofoam trays, containing approximately 200 cells each, and continue plant care until time to set.

However, Sexton is an independent farmer and having someone else control the initial phase of seed germination is not a suitable situation for someone who likes to understand and control everything himself.

For this tobacco season, Sexton is committing his entire crop to the flotation system.

The additional fertilizer in the soil seems to produce a healthier looking seedling in the initial growth stages, before the first tap roots reach the water beneath it.

"I can see the difference in the color of the first sprout leaves. In the fertilized soil, the sprouts have a darker green color to them and appear to be developing better," Sexton said.

The system Sexton has established involves a means in which to circulate the water beneath the flotation trays. Plastic piping runs inside each of the holding blocks and are equipped with water hose fittings so that the fertilizer mix can be introduced and circulated to all trays evenly. He can even control the concentration of the fertilizer in the basins in case the plants react to too much fertilization.

"I have a lot more control over my crop and I've been able to cut my labor needs down. Which is a benefit because in the last ten years, I haven't been able to get good experienced help with my crop as I did before," Sexton said.

There have been slight causes for concern with the success of the flotation system as Sexton has devised it. In several trays, he has noticed some cells are not "wicking up" the water as well as others. Most, he said, he can check up to inexperience with setting soil depth in the trays.

"But the problem hasn't been too serious. Even in some of the drier cells, sprouts have come out. Once that tap root sinks in, I expect to see those spots improve a lot."

## Haney says Nicholas not affected Jockey closes Cynthia plant

**By Josh Shephard**  
The Carlisle Mercury/John Shephard Photo

**CARLISLE**—Jockey International announced, last Friday, that it would begin the process of closing its sawing plant in Harrison County.

According to Jockey area President Don Haney, closing the plant would not have much of an effect on the needed production levels of the other three plants.

As stated in a press release sent out last Friday afternoon, the primary reason Jockey decided to close the Harrison County plant was the company's findings that plants employing 500 or more production workers operated more efficiently.

The Harrison County plant currently employs about 200 people.

Haney reiterated that no threat exists to the remaining three area Jockey plants. In fact, it was employee and production growth in those areas, he said, that contributed somewhat to their Cynthia plant decision.

"Given the technology today, it is far more efficient for this company to operate our 200 employee plants. In most cases, they can produce more in a given period of time and offer better room to expand. That was also a consideration. The Carlisle, Mt Sterling, and Maysville plants all are in a space where, if need be, they can be expanded. The Cynthia plant could not," Haney explained.

Though the loss of some 200 jobs will have some impact on Harrison County, Haney said only a small percentage of those employees came out of Nicholas County.

"We try to place employees where they are relatively close to their homes. I don't have exact numbers in front of me, but I do not think Nicholas County workers comprised a significant number of the Cynthia work force. Therefore I don't see the closing affecting Nicholas County as a whole to a great extent," Haney said.

However, administrators are trying to work out some way in which some jobs lost at the Cynthia plant could be taken up by other plants, he said. He could make no guarantees as to what or how many jobs would be open, because, he said, there are too many variables to take into account, such as if product demand.

"The Cynthia plant is housed in a very old building. It is difficult to maintain. That and the lack of a large work force to meet high levels of productivity forced us to make the decision to close," Haney said.

By June, according to plan, 33 percent of the work force would be phased out. By December, the plant is expected to be its doors completely.

## Nicholas takes top honors in science symposium and fair

**By Josh Shephard**  
The Carlisle Mercury/John Shephard Photo

**CARLISLE**—The tradition of the Nicholas County student-athlete lived on for three high school students at the Louisville Science Symposium Monday, March 23 and Morehead State Science Fair last weekend.

Juniors Nikki Smoot, Christie Hutton, and Johnny Griffith all brought home honors from both science exhibitions to continue Nicholas County's winning tradition in these events.

1992 marks the seventh consecutive year Nicholas County students have taken awards at the Louisville Science Symposium, garnering several scholarships. In addition, the annual awards presented by the Federal Department of Energy provide opportunities for visits and study to some of the most prestigious universities in the country.

It also marks the 17th consecutive year Nicholas County students have received honors at the Morehead State University science fair.

Nikki Smoot was one of 12 students chosen to give an oral presentation on her biology project. Christie Hutton's project was selected for a poster presentation and also vying for an award from the symposium.

Griffith was present in Louisville as an observer. Smoot finished as one of five chosen to go to the national science symposium in Knoxville, Tennessee in May and has the option to accept a four year scholarship to the University of Louisville.

In addition she also took one of the Department of Energy awards which will send her to Berkeley, California during the summer for a two week workshop.

In addition to coming off a rigorous schedule the preceding week during the girl's sweet sixteen, Smoot had never before made a presentation on a science project.

So on Monday morning, privately hoping she would called on to present her project later in the proceedings, judges chose her as first up to present her project and its findings.

"Though Nikki may not have thought so, it was probably to her benefit that she did go first. She had nobody on which she could pattern herself after and her normal performance was forced to come through," Green said.

At Morehead, all three girls placed somewhere in the competition.

Johnny Griffith's studies earned her a white ribbon in the category of microbiology; Hutton's project brought her a second place medal in the field of medicine and health as well as blue ribbon honors.

Smoot won for best biology project and took a first place medal in the field of zoology.

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Johnny Griffith, Nikki Smoot and Christie Hutton, participated in some aspect in both the Louisville Science Symposium and the Morehead State University Science Fair. Though Smoot was the big winner, each brought in awards from the Morehead Fair.

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