

This 'golden' tobacco crop thrives between grandpa and 7 grandchildren

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Abram M. Barley, Conestoga R2, has just finished stripping his fiftieth crop of tobacco. Asked if he enjoys it, he says simply, "I've done it all my life. I grew up between two rows of tobacco."

Indeed, the fifty crops he refers to are the fifty he has worked on since he's been growing the crop on his own. There were many more crops prior to that. He remembers helping his grandfather since the time he was about seven years old, or "ever since I could stand down and look up. I can remember when my Grandfather grew an acre where he lived. He planted it by hand."

Over the years, Barley has raised from six acres to a high of 32 acres. He recalls, "That was the year I bought this farm in 1962 and I needed the money. I had to hire a lot of help - a lot were school boys."

The last few years he has grown about 12 acres and still needs a lot of help, but has it close by in the seven grandchildren who are old enough and near enough to help. Abe now considers the tobacco farming something that is "between my grandchildren and myself."

They work mostly in the field,

I'm very particular in getting it in the bales straight."

One of the secrets of having children help in the stripping room, according to Barley, is not to allow more than two there at a time. "That allows ample supervision."

Barley emphasizes, "You can take a poor crop and make it look a lot better with proper handling or you can take a good crop and can spoil the appearance with improper handling."

He is justifiably proud of the time he delivered tobacco to the warehouse and was told, "You have it handled to perfection."

Barley got into tobacco farming on his own as a part time job while he worked in the silk mills, something he did for the first 13 years of his marriage. His first crop was six acres, although prior to that he had farmed on the shares with his father. He went into general farming in 1940 and started milking cows in 1943. He says, "I was born and raised on a farm. I never knew anything else."

Grace was also raised on a farm, so helped with tobacco as "long as I can remember anything." Barley says proudly, "She started right in. She did as much tobacco as I did."

Grace adds, "I'd rather have



Abram and Grace enjoy the time they spend with their eight grandchildren both in the tobacco field and on joy rides with Abram's newest additions - these two mules he pur-

chased to "play with." Pictured are, l to r, Tom, Susie, John, Tom, Cindy, Christopher, Abbey, Abe Jr., Abram and Grace.

years when all tobacco had to be sized. "When I started, we had to sort, then size. The tobacco was sized in two inch increments, then tied in heads." Barley adeptly demonstrated all of this in a way that shows the art is not easily forgotten.

If it is not difficult for him to recall the worst price he ever received for tobacco. It was in 1932-33, when he got eight cents for number one and two cents for fillers. And that was good! He explains that the price had dropped to four cents for number one grade and one half cent for fillers. "My Dad and I held out and kept it until the next crop came in. We lost some weight through holding it, but we came out with more than if we had sold."

Usually Abe sells his tobacco during Farm Show week, but this year his crop was sold in November, because "I had the opportunity to sell it if I sorted it." So he and Grace spent the Winter sorting, a job which Abe estimates added one third more time to the stripping process. He got \$1 for the first grade and \$.85 for the second grade—and the sorting brought him enjoyment. "I take pride in looking at a nice leaf."

He believes that sorting may become more popular in the future and may even be required by some. "Sorting is a coming thing. It will add to the cost (of producing

it) if you must hire help." Only grandsons Abe, Jr., and Robert were allowed to help-sort.

The Barleys spend long hours in the stripping room, but Abe says,

"I like it here when it's snowing and blowing outside." Grace agrees, "It's a nice place to be in winter." Working a ten hour day

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Tom, left, and brother Robert work alongside Grandpa in the stripping room. Close supervision ensures proper handling, an important consideration for Barley.

helping with the planting and topping and cutting; but they also take a turn in the tobacco stripping room.

The seven grandchildren who help are the children of sons Abram and John, operators of Star Rock Holstein Farm. It is on their land that Barley grows tobacco, now that they have taken over the family farm.

The grandchildren are: Abe, Jr., 15; Abbey, 14; John, 8; Robert, 12; Tom, 11; Susie, 9; and Cindy, 7. Christopher, 1, doesn't yet work in the fields.

The grandchildren not only share in each step of the process, they also share in the profits. Barley explains that he takes only what he is allowed to maintain his Social Security, and the children divide the rest of the profits.

Barley acknowledges that his biggest help is his wife, Grace. "My wife and I stripped almost all of it," he says. That's not to say the children are left out of the stripping. Often after school work and other farm chores are done they will be in the stripping room and Barley takes great pride in teaching them to work methodically and neatly. He says, "This is one of those things that you can do as easy right or wrong.

been in the field than in the house. I enjoyed it." She worked in the high school kitchen for 13 years, but not until the last of their six children was in college. All six children learned to work in tobacco as they grew up.

The Barleys recall, of course, the



The most consistent team during the stripping season is Grace and Abe who spend up to ten hours daily in the stripping room. This year they sorted their crop, something they haven't done for many years.

Homestead Notes



A "perfect" hand of tobacco. Barley demonstrated sorting and tying hands, a requirement for all tobacco growers years ago, now becoming an unnecessary art.