



Farm Talk

by
Jerry Webb
Delaware Extension

How can Uncle Sam condemn cigarette smoking through the Surgeon General's office and then pay farmers to grow tobacco? That's an often asked question especially by non-smokers who would love to see cigarette smoking banned and tobacco production outlawed. As a non-smoker I can sympathize with some of that point of view. But the implications of banning cigarette smoking and eliminating tobacco production are far reaching and very complex.

Down in North Carolina where tobacco is the state's number one crop, some researchers have written a publication on the tobacco production situation. They're not even considering outlawing the crop, just eliminating the government quotas and price supports. The authors Daniel Summer and Julian Alston, two North Carolina State University economists, are quick to point out that they are not advocating this nor are they predicting it. But they say that the elimination of government controls in the tobacco industry are within the realm of possibility and so they are presenting some of the possible consequences as food for thought.

First off, they say to eliminate the tobacco programs would result in the loss of about 800 million dollars in annual income to quota and allotment holders. That's a considerable chunk of money divided among a lot of farmers,

many of them small subsistence farmers who count on no more than a fraction of an acre of tobacco for their livelihood. Between their government payments and the sale from their garden size tobacco patches, they are able to get by.

The researchers don't say this but it's my belief that many of the elderly tobacco growers with small allotments and small incomes would otherwise be welfare cases. It's hard to believe but thousands of tobacco farmers make a living, not necessarily a good one, but they survive, with a little patch of tobacco and what income they can generate otherwise on a small hilly southern farm. Some don't even own modern machinery, preferring instead to stick to the old ways of a mule and a walking plow. They grow their tobacco allotment and a garden, raise some livestock for their own consumption and do what they can to hold down expenses. In that way they are able to hang on to a way of life they have always known and to stay off the welfare rolls—something they are very proud of.

Summer and Alston go on to point out that contrary to popular belief getting the government out of the tobacco program wouldn't cut down on cigarette consumption. It might clear the government conscience not to be paying farmers to produce something as deadly as tobacco but the researchers say that should the government pull out, the price of

tobacco would fall perhaps 20 or 30 percent, demand would increase 50 to 100 percent and growers would actually produce more tobacco to meet the demand. They believe total revenue earned by the American tobacco growers would increase by as much as 25 to 75 percent.

And here is another kick in the pants, U.S. tobacco exports would increase by about 100 percent. In addition, U.S. cigarette manufacturers would substitute domestic tobacco for most imported leaf other than the oriental types. In other words getting the government out of the quota and support payment business would free up the industry. The price would go down, production would increase and instead of fewer cigarettes there would actually be more.

The North Carolina researchers go on to point out that tobacco production would shift to some extent to areas of least cost production. This might create new income in some agricultural areas while robbing from some traditional tobacco counties.

The elimination of quotas would mean tobacco farms would continue to expand in size as are some others kinds of agricultural enterprises in today's economy.

The government is into tobacco production controls the same way it's into some other phases of production agriculture. At some point in time farmers asked for help and the government responded. After so many years it would be most difficult to get the government out again. This is true also in the dairy industry and for

some other commodities. But the big difference is the increasing pressure that is being brought to bare to stop the government from supporting a crop that is considered by an expanding number of people to be unhealthy.

Tobacco is not a food or fiber crop. People don't eat it or wear it. They simply smoke it or chew it or dip it. And it could be said that it is an unnecessary crop—that the land might be put to better uses. Like producing food for hungry people. Eliminating government controls in the tobacco industry won't change that. As long as people want tobacco there will be a market and if it's a profitable market farmers will grow the stuff. Look what's happening with marijuana another crop that can

be smoked. Efforts to control it's illegal production are futile. Many observers say it's only a matter of time until marijuana is legalized simply to take advantage of the potential tax revenues and because it's hopeless to control it.

The government may be pressured into eliminating or at least drastically reducing its involvement in the tobacco program. That would save some tax dollars, bring tremendous hardship on thousands of subsistence level tobacco growers and make some people feel better about what the government is doing toward a bothersome problem. But that effort would have little or no impact on the amount of tobacco that's used in this country.

Expanded dual label allows broader use

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Dual 8E herbicide, manufactured by Ciba-Geigy, recently received approval from EPA for revised labeling that allows additional timing of applications on corn, soybeans and sorghum. The revised label also allows Dual 8E use on additional ornamental species as well as adding shattercane to the list of partially controlled weeds.

The revised labeling allows Dual to be used in preplant surface applications for corn, soybeans and sorghum up to 45 days before planting. In addition, corn growers in the Mid-Atlantic states of Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia can now use Dual in a

tank mix with Banvel for post-emergence applications to control pigweed.

Growers can apply 1.5-2.25 pints per acre of Dual 8E plus 0.5-1 pint per acre of Banvel or 1-2 pints per acre of Banvel II by ground equipment when pigweed plants are less than 3-inches tall and before corn exceeds 5-inches in a minimum of 20 gallons of spray per acre.

Shattercane was added to the list of weeds partially controlled by Dual and suggestions for improving partial control are also included on the label.

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