

Pa. Tobacco Growers May Have Market In Md.

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Lancaster Farming Staff
NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — Perhaps the tobacco growing season, at least for next year, can be redeemed.

While reeling prices have put some tobacco planting intentions on hold for regional growers, there's a possibility that Pennsylvania-grown tobacco could find a home in Maryland, which has experienced better prices.

Tobacco sold in Maryland auctions has to be inspected and approved through a testing process that ensures nitrogen and alkaloid levels are low. Because of Pennsylvania's heavier soils, which retain nutrients that can appear at higher levels in Pennsylvania-grown tobacco, tobacco may not suit buyers who come into the Maryland markets.

According to Raymond Guy,

manager of Farmer's Warehouse in Hughesville, Md. (about 50 miles south of Washington, D.C.), the five buyers who purchase Maryland-grown tobacco at the auction would have to be interested in tobacco from Pennsylvania. He said many Pennsylvania farmers have asked about the opportunities to sell Pennsylvania tobacco at the auction, and the auction is working to see if buyers would be interested.

If buyers were, the tobacco would have to be specially labeled out of state, tested, and paperwork would have to assure the tobacco meets special criteria.

The Maryland auction, one of two auctions housing Maryland-grown tobacco, makes up about 28 percent of the tobacco sold in Maryland, noted Guy. The tobacco is tested by the University of Maryland for alkaloids, nitro-

gen, and other factors. The buyers look toward these tests to ensure the quality of tobacco.

"A lot of our European buyers can tell what we got," said Guy. "They know what they're buying."

The buyers are from Switzerland, Germany, and Italy.

Maryland-grown tobacco tests lower in nitrogen and alkaloids, probably because of the light, gravelly, sandy soils with no manure applications, noted Dennis Hess, manager of the Pennsylvania Tobacco Marketing Association Auction in New Holland. Pennsylvania-grown tobacco soils are heavier and retain chemicals in them for "years," he said.

Hess said that recently about five different Pennsylvania farmers submitted Maryland 609 samples to David Conrad at the Maryland Department of Agriculture to check to see if the

samples meet potential Maryland auction buyer requirements.

Some growers in Pennsylvania believe their tobacco could meet Maryland requirements.

If so, the idea of marketing Pennsylvania-grown, Maryland-type tobacco in Maryland could improve some prices for tobacco growers in southeast Pennsylvania.

Occasionally, Maryland tobacco at the Maryland auctions sells for as high as \$1.80 a pound, Hess noted.

Maryland auctions operate beginning next week and continue with 15 sales well into April.

"If we can work on getting tests more in line, maybe we can market this tobacco to buyers in Maryland," said Hess.

A meeting of the Pennsylvania Tobacco Marketing Association was conducted Monday

evening to find ways to develop markets similar to Maryland's.

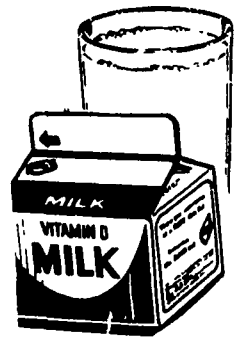
At the Farmer's Warehouse Auction in Hughesville, Md., sales begin next Tuesday, March 21, at 9 a.m.

Another Maryland market, Planter's Warehouse, also auctions Maryland tobacco. Planter's can be reached at (301) 627-3571.

Farmer's Warehouse in Hughesville can be reached at (301) 274-3124.

Sales at the Pennsylvania tobacco auction in New Holland continue March 23 at 10 a.m. The last sale, noted Hess, is March 28.

Hess can be reached at (717) 355-5336.



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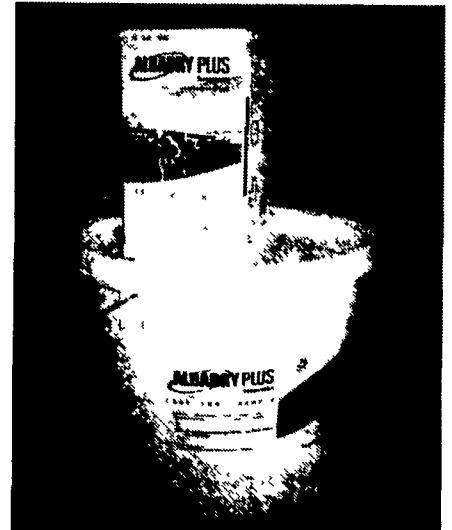
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