

THE TOBACCO CROP

The tobacco crop was the pride of both our mother and dad, and was their joint venture throughout the year as it took the entire year to complete the cycle of raising it. When it was sold, our dad was always pleased with the good quality of the leaves, and the good price paid for them.

Early in the spring, our mother planted the tobacco seeds in some soil, and put the cartons behind the kitchen stove where it was war. When they sprouted, and eventually grew into small plants, they were then replanted into a tobacco bed several hundred feet long, and about 8 feet wide, and covered them with a gauze netting to keep the animals and birds from eating the tender shoots, and also to provide a humid moisture under the netting. When they were large enough for planting in the fields, they were pulled out by hand, placed carefully in cardboard cartons. These cartons were then placed on the back of the tobacco planter, between my mother and another person who dropped the plants into the ground furrowed by the planter, and driven

very slowly by the horses to allow time to plant and pick up another plant at every 3 feet, or thereabouts. This space was necessary to allow for the spread of the leaves as the plant matured. Rain was always welcome after the planting was finished to give the plants a good start. In a few weeks, our mother hoed the weeds around the plants, and "re-hilled" them so that they were firmly implanted and supported with soil. We kids were taken along to help, but if we cut off the plants, we were restricted to just pulling weeds, no hoeing. Day after day, our mother hoed until the field was done. In another few weeks, "topping" was needed which meant many more days of walking through the rows and pinching off the tops of the plants, one by one, to assure that the lower leaves would grow large and healthy. Weather was always a worry at this time as a hail storm or heavy rain storm could ruin the leaves at this time in their growth.

Also, throughout the process, we picked off the long, green tobacco worms that adhered on the back of the leaves. Perhaps they got a little nicotine from the juice of the lush leaves, but they were dangerous as they would eat holes in the leaves, and spoil the quality. Harvesting was critical, also, as it had to be done before the first frost. The stalks were then cut down, by hand, and long days were spent spearing the stalks on a lath, and carefully hung on a rack on a wagon. When full it was transported to the tobacco shed, and hung there to cure and dry, during the fall.

Foggy, damp weather was good for the final stages of curing as the leaves were then more

supple. Then, in winter, our mother and dad stripped the tobacco leaves from the stalks, laid them in a rectangular box lined with heavy brown paper, and wrapped and bundled them with twine when the box was full. They were then piled for sale to a tobacco buyer.