



MARKETING MATTERS

**Kentucky
Department
of Agriculture**

**A Consumer
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Tobacco Tried and Still True

By Bill Holleran
Marketing Matters Editor

When the Kentucky Department of Agriculture started this publication in 2000, tobacco quotas were dwindling, and there was a lot of concern about the future of tobacco in Kentucky. Although we don't produce as much tobacco as we once did before the "buy-out," tobacco is still a mainstay in the fabric of Kentucky agriculture.

The Paschall family of Murray has diversified its farming operation since the end of the tobacco quota system, but tobacco has remained the yardstick by which their other crops are measured.

Mitchell, Jana and son Kody are living proof that full-time careers in production agriculture are still possible with hard work and determination. Mitchell was raised on his family's farm in Murray, where they raised row crops and tobacco. "I remember going with Granddaddy when I was as a kid to the tobacco barns. He would always feel of the leaves first thing when he went into the barn.... Fire curing tobacco is really more art than science, and it's hard to tell someone how to do it. It's just something you grow up knowing about. We use sawmill slabs and sawdust to set the fires, and you really have to know what you're doing. You can cure it too slow or too fast. If we cut tobacco on Monday, we would normally fire it on Friday. The first two fires dries it out, and the last two puts the finish or shine on it," Paschall said.

Paschall also said they have found it better to cut the dark and leave it on the ground to wilt and then come back, spear it and take it out of the field before it sunburns. "Science still hasn't come up with a magic formula for fire cur-



Mitchell Paschall's dark tobacco on the left and burley tobacco on the right.

ing dark tobacco. There's really an art to it," said Paschall. Paschall said there is a big demand for dark tobacco this year with contract prices at around \$2.50 per pound compared to \$1.75 for burley. Paschall contracts his dark tobacco to Conwood and his burley with Philip Morris.

This changing demand has the Paschalls building new curing barns for dark-fired tobacco and putting more of their crop in dark than burley. This year the Paschalls are doubling their dark tobacco production to nearly 200,000 pounds compared to 25,000 pounds of burley.

The Paschalls are also producing tobacco seed for Workman Tobacco Seed of Murray — a large tobacco seed supplier in western Kentucky. "Tobacco seed production is very labor intensive, often requiring nearly 1,000 hours of labor per acre," said Jana. "We're raising about 3 1/2 acres of tobacco for seed this year," she said.

Migrant workers collect the pollen, and then it's screened and dried out for later use. Once dried, the pollen is

brushed on to each of the flowers on the plant. When the plant is pollinated and the seed pod forms, the pods are removed and the seed is collected.

In addition to tobacco, the Paschalls raise 20 acres of seedless mini-watermelons for Farm-Whey Produce and 350 acres of soybeans and 80 acres of field corn not to mention a commercial tree nursery, a greenhouse where bedding plants are sold to local garden centers, boxwoods, and mums for local sales. Tobacco trans-

plants are also raised for their own use and for sale to local farmers.

"We started the nursery in 2001 and also grew cantaloupes for the Green River Produce Cooperative when we were thinking about what to do after the tobacco buy-out. After the co-op dissolved, Farm-Whey came to us and asked us to grow for them," said Paschall. Paschall said his trees and produce have been competitive with his tobacco revenue. "Our only down-time is in January, and that's when we attend nursery trade shows across the country to market our trees and shrubs," said Jana.

Although most of the co-ops that were operating in the late '90s are no longer operating, they did give committed growers like the Paschalls the help they needed to get started in the commercial vegetable and nursery businesses. Commercial growers like Paschall have been able to maintain contacts with the buyers that previously purchased product from the co-ops.

"Farming is hard work, but there's nothing more enjoyable or rewarding," said Jana.

15-YEAR-OLD'S KENTUCKY PROUD PRODUCTS WILL SHOW UP ON STORE SHELVES ALL OVER THE COMMONWEALTH

KDA Press Release

A 15-year-old sophomore at West Jessamine County High School has turned an FFA project into a tomato-growing operation that will reach the shelves at top retailers this fall.

Alex Tingle of Nicholasville will be the focus of promotional efforts related to a restaurant partnership in northern Kentucky and Remke Markets, and the fruit of his labors will appear statewide on shelves of more than 100 Save-A-Lot stores in Kentucky.

"Alex is just one more example of hard work and the support of farm families that make Kentucky Proud succeed so dramatically," Commissioner Richie Farmer said.

"You've heard me talk about teamwork, and Alex stands as that kind of example," Commissioner Farmer said. "He took a classroom project to the top of the retail market by networking with my team at the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and other Kentucky Proud members."

Tingle started a major tomato-growing operation as a freshman project, working with his FFA advisor and ag teacher, Ryan Thomas.

"What Alex proposed as a freshman is one of the best project proposals that I've seen because of the size, scope and amount of work," Thomas said.

"He worked many hours into the night. I would have to call him in at 1 in the morning, asking him to quit working and come to bed so he could get some sleep before school," said his mom, Kathy Fields, who is a principal at West Jessamine County Middle School.

Alex initially planned to have 100 tomato plants at most and figured that he would sell at the local farmers' market. But Thomas' ag class didn't sell all their plants from the greenhouse they run at the school.

At the end of the school year this spring, Alex informed his mom that he was going to bring home all the unsold plants.

"I thought he was talking about another 40 or 50 plants," Kathy said. "It was 900 total plants, including 700 tomatoes."

Alex planted everything by hand. He did not have a tractor. He tilled a massive garden space that had been idle pasture for the 13 years the family has lived at their rural Nicholasville home. Previously, they had raised Angus cattle.



Alex Tingle, second from left, shows off the fruits of his labor with the rest of his team: from left, Alex's mother, Kathy Fields; his FFA advisor, Ryan Thomas, and Burlington processor Millard Long.

Alex and his brother had an earlier farm project when they were younger: "Goats!" Kathy said. "I like tomatoes better. Tomatoes don't get out, and your neighbors don't complain about tomatoes loose in their yard."

Of the 700 tomato plants, 425 are Roma tomatoes, perfect for the pulp that salsa-maker Millard Long of Boone County needs for a number of private-label products he processes.

"As soon as I saw all the blooms, flowers everywhere, I panicked," Alex said. "'Mom, can you help?'"

The Tingles know Kevan Evans in Georgetown, owner of Evans Orchard, which also has a country store. Evans couldn't buy that many tomatoes, but he knew Millard Long through a connection made by Roger Snell of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.

Snell networked Long and Evans together more than a year ago to process apple butter for Ale-8-One from apple pulp from 10 orchards left from the cider-making process.

Alex e-mailed Long, and he visited the Tingles at their home, offering to buy all of Alex's tomato harvest and even some of his peppers.

"For somebody just getting started, he did a thorough job," Long said. "He had a plan. He took it upon himself to find a market for all of it. He did all of the work by hand. He solicited the help of friends. I'm very impressed with his resourcefulness and the support he got from Ryan [his ag teacher] and his mom."

Long said he started his processing business with a firm commitment to Kentucky

growers. All of his private-label sauces, salsas, apple butter and other products are directly sourced from Kentucky farms in season.

"Alex is 15 now," Long said. "It is a great feeling to help someone like this out. In 10 years, I may be retired. In 10 years, Alex will be 25 and just the kind of person to take the reins of his own company, processing his own products. His work ethic is what will make the difference."

Alex traces the hard work of farming to grandparents who raised tobacco in Scott and Jessamine counties, starting with mules.

Long said he has a soft spot for future farmers like Alex and anyone else in the business now. "My parents were farmers, but they had to give it up and go to the city to

work," Long said.

Long closed the deal with Alex after inspecting the farm and seeing that Alex used city water, drip irrigation and had not used any pesticides in the garden during the growing season. In fact, Alex and Ryan are now linking up with Michael Fitzgerald at KDA to see if the entire operation can be certified organic, beginning with the plants and fertilizer in the greenhouse next season.

Alex plans to use the money from Long's purchases for his college savings. He will major in agriculture and hopes to go to Morehead State University or the University of Kentucky.

Long was a key supplier of one of the single largest transactions in Kentucky Proud's young history when Save-A-Lot ordered four tractor-trailer loads of Long's salsa for its 102 Kentucky stores in August.

As Save-A-Lot prepares to reorder, Alex's tomatoes will be part of the product. The tomatoes also will go to a major partnership of restaurants in northern Kentucky that are launching a series of retail sauces, salsas and special recipes for sale at retail.

Kroger, Biggs, Meijer and Wal-Mart also are in early stages of launching products processed by Long. Tingle's tomatoes will be part of six-figure purchases of tomatoes that Long will buy from several central Kentucky farms this year.

New Agritourism Logo Unveiled At The State Fair

KDA Press Release

Kentucky officials unveiled a new state agritourism logo to raise public awareness of Kentucky's more than 250 farm-based destinations Aug. 14 at the Kentucky State Fair in Louisville.

The logo appears on the Kentucky Farms Are Fun Web site, an online directory of Kentucky farm attractions that enables consumers to search for agritourism adventures by activity, region or county. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture and the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet launched the Web site earlier this year.

"Farms are exciting places to live, work and – increasingly – to visit," said Governor Steve Beshear. "By merging our agricultural heritage with marketing principles, we can create tourist attractions that not only entice visitors but also provide business opportunities for our farmers. Since 2005, the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board has provided \$2 million to develop and stimulate the growing agritourism industry."

Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer said the Kentucky Farms Are Fun Web site lists 269 agritourism businesses in 76 Kentucky counties.



"Although these days fewer Kentuckians live on the farm, many want to learn more about agriculture, which has always been such an important part of our Commonwealth's heritage," Commissioner Farmer said. "Today we unveil the new logo for the Web site and for a new campaign to let our guests know about the many fun activities they can enjoy on the farm."

Marcheta Sparrow, secretary of the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet, pointed out that tourism generates \$10

billion in economic activity every year in the Bluegrass State. She tied agritourism to the Department of Travel's "Discover Your Own Backyard" campaign.

"I'm proud that our backyard includes those barnyards, pastures and farm operations that are so important to the Commonwealth," Secretary Sparrow said.

The blue, green and red colors of the new agritourism logo match the Kentucky Proud logo, which identifies food products made in Kentucky.

To find out more about Kentucky farm destinations, go to www.kentuckyfarmsarefun.com.

Job Corps students tour Winchester Farm

Staff Report

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture's aquaculture marketing specialist, Angela Caporelli, worked with culinary instructors

this summer to organize a farm tour for eastern Kentucky Job Corps culinary and hospitality students. Culinary instructors wanted the students to better understand the link between consumers and where our food comes from.

The students toured the highly diversified McCord farm in Winchester. Students saw vegetables, tobacco, tilapia, freshwater prawns, and quail. The kids walked through the fields, saw the fish ponds, and asked questions. "Most of these kids had never been to a farm and didn't realize how much goes into production and processing farm products," Caporelli said.

Caporelli had previously worked to bring culinary students from Sullivan University to George Gagel's farm in Louisville.

"The Office of Agriculture Marketing and Product Promotion is committed to helping kids learn about agriculture. Our Shows and Fairs division, Agriculture in the Classroom program and other marketing employees have always been ready to help Kentucky agriculture educators and youth leaders across Kentucky. We're proud of this commitment," said Mac Stone, executive director of the Office of Agriculture Marketing and Product Promotion.



Farmers' Markets Celebrate Success

By Janet Eaton

Cooking contests, food, children's activities, tote bag giveaways, music, and more highlighted the celebration of Kentucky Farmers' Market Week August 2-9.

All across the state farmers' markets observed the week as a chance to thank their customers, appreciate their vendors and reflect on all the markets do for their communities.

"It was a week of local food, fun and celebration," said Coy Wilson, president of the Kentucky Farmers' Market Association. "Markets took the opportunity to kick up their heels and throw a party."

The KFMA offered cost share grants to markets to hold their celebrations. Eighteen markets applied for and received the grants. The funds were made available through a market development grant from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.



Jackie Robertson and Richard Voyles dress up for old-fashion days. The cake was made by Paula Lucas in Fordsville.

The KFMA is a membership organization that serves as a voice for all markets and market vendors. It maintains a Web site to increase communication between all concerned with markets. The Web site is www.kentuckyfarmersmarket.org.

There are now 120 registered farmers' markets in the state with gross sales of more than \$8 million, according to Janet Eaton, farmers' market specialist from KDA.

"The actual sales figure is probably higher," said Eaton. "The numbers we have rely heavily on self reporting."

KDA issues an annual report on farmers' markets each year summarizing all data collected during the registration process. The 2008 report will be released September 1. The annual reports can be found at www.kyagr.com/marketing/farmmarket/index.htm.

New Food Distributor Links Farms to Louisville Markets

By *Bill Holleran*

One of the major challenges facing farmers today is finding time to market their products or accessing new markets. Some of us spend all our time growing and harvesting our crops, and marketing can seem time consuming and frustrating. Veteran producers will tell you not to grow it if you can't sell it.

If you enjoy production more than marketing and need an outlet for your products, there is a new local food distributor in Kentucky purchasing food products from local growers.

"Grasshoppers' goal is to help rural producers access Louisville markets," said Grasshoppers manager Berea Ernst. "We purchase food products from farmers that are sold to independent restaurants and grocery stores in the Louisville area. The company is in its second season, and business is good – we're already making plans for next year," said Ernst.

Ernst credits institutions such as the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD), the University of Kentucky, and the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board as being helpful in sharing their expertise to get them started. "We're trying to be the link in this new agriculture economy. Marketing and distribution are the biggest challenges farmers face, and we are trying to fill the missing link," said Ernst.

Grasshoppers works on the "just-in-time" business philosophy. It doesn't warehouse product, so everything stays fresh.

"We maintain freshness by not storing product for more than 18 hours," said Ernst.

On Mondays producers notify Grasshoppers of what products they have available that week. Sales people then write orders after notifying Grasshoppers customers of what's available. On Thursday producers deliver products to Louisville or have them picked up by a truck, that makes stops along I-64 between Louisville and Lexington. Orders are then delivered to customers on Friday. "What makes us unique is that we list on each invoice where the product originated and also offer producer profiles for customers that want to 'source-verify' these products," Ernst said. "We are also encouraging producers to join the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Kentucky Proud program. Producers are

required to join the program in order to continue doing business with Grasshoppers.

"We've purchased products from over 50 producers and have not turned any reputable farmer away," said Ernst. Farmers' market vendors typically receive between 50-70 percent of the prices generated by retail sales. Prices are determined by looking at USDA wholesale produce terminal market prices and the Kentucky farmers' market report prices.

Grasshoppers operated a 70-member CSA this season and plans to grow the CSA for 2009. It is also looking for producers that want to wholesale part of their crops next year. For more information about Grasshoppers' services or opportunities, visit its listing on Local Harvest at <http://www.localharvest.org/member/M20823> or call Berea Ernst at (502) 708-1881.



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