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**Group Urges Leaf Growers
To Avoid Discount Types**

By Bill Humphries
NCSU Agricultural
Communications

A group of farm leaders and agricultural officials, meeting in Raleigh last week, expressed concern about the increasing production of discount-type tobacco varieties in North Carolina. They outlined steps to reverse the trend and encourage the growing of quality tobacco.

The group appealed to flue-cured leaf growers to use only acceptable seed varieties when they sow their plant beds this month and next.

Buying companies generally try to avoid purchasing discount-type tobacco because it is low in nicotine and flavor and therefore lacking in quality. This results in displacement of U.S. leaf on both domestic and world markets.

Discount-type tobacco is not always easy to identify on the warehouse floor, especially during fast-paced auction sales. Each year some grades bring good prices even though, if they were identified, they would be supported at only 50 percent of the rates for comparable grades of standard varieties.

Varieties designated as "discount" by USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) are C-139, 140, 187 Golden Wilt, 316, Reams 64 and Dixie Bright 244. None of these are registered for sale in North Carolina.

Other names — Barn Buster, for example — are used for discount types in some local areas, officials said. In some cases, they added, farmers grow and save their own discount-type seed from year to year.

Although the percentage of growers producing discount types is relatively small, it has increased to the point where farm, warehouse and buying interests are becoming concerned, said state Sen. James D. Speed of Louisburg, a tobacco warehouseman.

To qualify for price support, the flue-cured grower must certify each year that he is not growing discount-type tobacco.

State ASCS Committee Chairman Marshall W. Grant of Garysburg said his agency was studying ways to monitor the discount tobacco situation. He said a farmer making a false certification is subject to prosecution for a criminal violation of the U.S. Code.

The farm group meeting here requested that ASCS consider spot-checking random fields. It also asked the Flue-Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corp., which tests leaf for residues of MH sucker control chemical, to consider expanding its program to include checking leaf for chemical composition.

The N.C. Department of Agriculture will turn over to ASCS any evidence that a grower has planted a discount type, said George E. Spain, head of NCDA's seed division, and William G. Parham Jr., deputy commissioner.

There was general agreement at the meeting that increasing quantities of discount-type tobacco could threaten the solvency of the price support program and force growers and allotment holders to pay larger assessments to Stabilization's No Net Cost Fund, which was

established last year to cover costs of the program.

The per-pound assessment this year will be seven cents, as compared with three cents last year.

Because discount leaf is inferior in quality, it continues to be a factor in the decline in America's share of the world market, said Dr. Hugh C. Kiger, spokesman for Leaf Tobacco Exporters Association.

Tobacco Associates, the flue-cured growers' worldwide promotional organization, is concerned about the problem and supports action to deal with it, said Charlie King of the Raleigh office.

Some discount varieties are popular with farmers because they are high-yielding and are relatively easy to produce and cure.

Agriculture Commissioner James A. Graham earlier this month publicly called attention to the increasing problem of discount varieties and urged farmers not to grow them.

Fred G. Bond, general manager of Stabilization, said at last week's meeting that he and his board of directors "certainly don't want to see a return to the kind of situation we had in the mid 1950s."

In 1955 and '56 the cooperative received more than 600 million pounds of C-139, 140 and Dixie Bright 244 under loan because these tobaccos were not in demand. Later these stocks were sold at a loss of \$35 million in principal and millions more in interest.

To deal with the problem, USDA in 1957 began its 50 percent discount.

William D. Lewis, agricultural adviser to Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., proposed changes in grade standards and support rates by grades, if these steps are needed, to encourage production of quality tobacco. He also suggested that the Regional Flue-Cured Variety Evaluation Committee be asked to define or describe a quality variety.

Spokesmen William E. Little of N.C. Farm Bureau, Jim Oliver of N.C. State Grange and T.C. Blalock of the Tobacco Growers Association of N.C. assured the meeting their organizations would support efforts to deal with the discount problem.

"We need to convince farmers that only acceptable varieties should be planted," said Blalock.

Oliver said farmers should be informed that the buying companies regularly monitor flue-cured crop production and can single out and possibly limit purchases in market areas where the discount-variety problem is most severe.

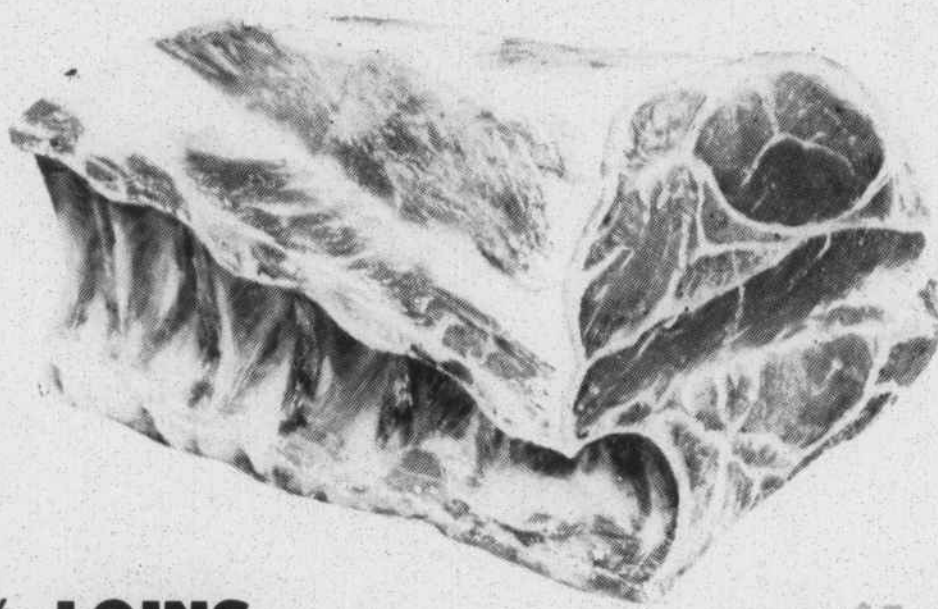
Dr. W.K. Collins, extension tobacco specialist at N.C. State University, said the growing of discount types "could jeopardize the loan program, especially in years of high rainfall."

Collins also said tobacco with discount characteristics "tarnishes the reputation of traditional, high-quality American flue-cured leaf" at home and abroad.

Every grower now has a direct financial stake in the success of the price support program, Collins said, because growers themselves must make up any losses.

Agricultural lenders — banks, production credit associations, Farmers Home Administration — will be asked to insist that their borrowers not grow discount types.

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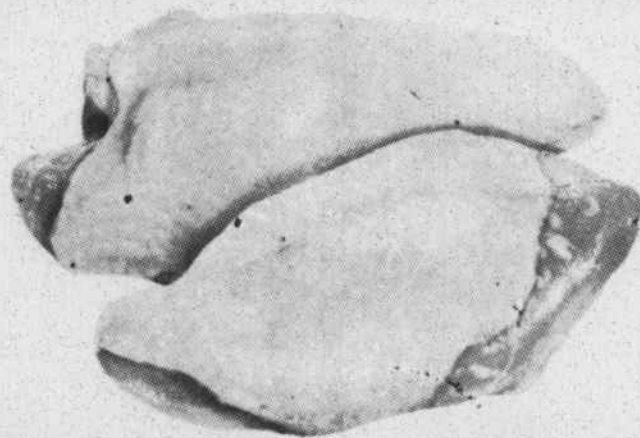
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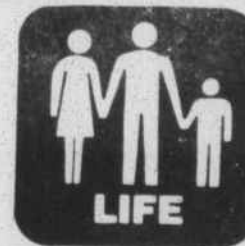
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