

Conversation with white female, Olmstead, Kentucky (Transcription)

THE NEXT EXCERPT IS ALSO FROM W 88 <unintelligible text>

RESPONDENT: The first thing they do is to make the plant bed, and ...

QUESTIONER: Make the plant bed.

R: Uh-huh. Then canvas it. They usually do that in the fall or spring, either one. We did ours spring this year, but either fall last year.

Q: And canvas it?

R: In the fall, put plastic over it. And then we take that plastic off, and then throw the seed and put canvas over it. And then from there on, we just, as soon as the seed is big enough we just transfer it to the field.

Q: When, when is that?

R: When they're about, oh, I'd say, oh, ten inches tall.

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Q: Referring to size, then, of ...

R: Uh-huh.

Q: Uh-huh.

R: If, depends on the size, you know.

Q: When they start coming out, start ...

R: About, when they first come out?

Q: ().

R: They just about the size of a dime, I mean they just come up about, and they start growing after that.

Q: Yeah.

R: And then they use about a tablespoon of seed to the hundred yards.

Q: How do you sow it?

R: Uh, by hand.

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Q: By hand.

R: Uh-huh, they mix it with fertilizer. Mix the seed with fertilizer and then throw it over the plant bed. And then they...

Q: Most people still throw it by hand?

R: Uh-huh.

Q: That seems strange.

R: Yeah, they throw it, they sow the seeds by hand.

Q: ().

R: And then they canvas it, and then after the, they begin to grow, of course, why then they transplant them to the field, after they have, but they take the canvas off, oh, I'd say about a week before they do. In order to, the plants to be nice and strong. And then they set it with a tobacco setter pulled behind

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the tractor.

Q: How do you get them out of the bed?

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R: Oh, you pull them. Which is hard work. (laughter) You pull them. () you pull them out!
By hand.

Q: Uh-huh.

R: See the 'bacco industry, that's a hand, it's truly a hand product.

Q: Yeah, they do ...

R: And they pull them out by hand, and then they set them in the field with this tobacco setter.

Q: What do you put, where, how do you carry them to the field? What do you put them in?

R: Usually in bushel baskets. And the ground's prepared very thoroughly. Has a nice even ground, and they don't mark it off anymore like they used to. They just set it, the tractor marks it as they go.

Q: But they used to have a implement, or some kind of a mechanical device to mark it off?

R: Yes, uh-huh.

Q: What was it?

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R: Usually, well, they just called it a marker. But they don't use that anymore because the tobacco setter marks it as they go.

Q: Yeah.

R: See, they used to check it from both directions so that they plant would be in a check. Just like you've seen orange groves in a check, marked-off. Well, they don't do that anymore. They

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just cultivate it in one direction.

Q: What was the marker like?

R: Well, it was a, usually pulled by mules, and it, a lot of times they used the corn planter to mark it. Because the rows, the corn planter was the same distance as was the tobacco setter.

Q: Oh yeah.

R: And they checked it both directions, one way one, one way the other.

Q: That was pretty, either way you look at it, it was going to...

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R: Uh-huh. But they don't do it anymore.

Q: They don't, uh-huh. (phone rings)

R: No, they just mark it with a tobacco setter. And of course () the tobacco setter and set it out. Water it as they go. And then after they ..

Q: That water, when the water comes down ...

R: As the, as the tobacco setter, as the wheels turn over it's got a device on it that clicks. And every time the thing clicks, why the men put a plant in and water, right there with it. And then after they set it, (laughs), they cultivate it. And of course they have to put some sort of poison on it to keep the bugs off. Insect, insecticide to keep the bugs off. Keep the flea beetles from eating it up.

Q: What are the bugs that used to bother it before you had all they poisons?

R: Worms and flea-bugs, and lice.

Q: And lice?

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R: Mm-hmm. What they call little green lice. Bother it, and they, I don't know what insecticides they use. I really don't know that. My husband will have to tell you about that, because I really don't know.

Q: Yeah. What kind of worms?

R: Just tobacco worms. A long green worm, and they could eat it up in a little while. And they use something to kill it off. And then they cultivate it. I would say about three or four times. With a, usual thing, my husband uses a tractor the first time. And a lot of people don't, always use tractors. They a lot of people around here don't have horses and mules anymore, but we do. We keep mules and Tom always cultivates it with mules.

Q: And that's, a lot of people prefer that.

R: Mm-hmm. And so, but they're getting to be a thing of the past. You can't hardly find one. And then after it has, after they've got it cultivated, in about, waist-high, I'd say, and begins to bloom.

Q: Begins to bloom.

R: Why, they top it. They break the top out of it. And then after they break the top out of it, they, these little suckers will come. But now they've got an oil that they put on it to so it won't have any suckers on it. So that has to be done by hand. (laughs)

Q: A lot of hand-work!

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R: All of that has to be done by hand!

Q: How do they--excuse me.

R: Yes?

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Q: How do they refer to it when it starts getting a certain size? Out in the field, and it's filling-out.

R: Well they usually say it's "dropping-over".

Q: It's what?

R: "Dropping-over".

Q: It's "dropping-over"?

R: The leaves drop over from the top. And then they, after it's gotten, after they has stood there, I'd say, maybe, five weeks after they first topping, why, why after they have topped it off, it begins to thicken.

Q: It begins to thicken?

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R: Uh-huh. It thickens up. And then it grains-up. And then they know it's ripe, when it's up.

Q: Ah, it grains-up.

R: Uh-huh. And then they ...

Q: Tell me, excuse me, tell me more about that grain. If it's in good condition ...

R: If it's in good condition it'll really be real thick and gray and has lots of gum on it.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

R: You can go through it and your hands'll get just as gummy and I mean it just builds up on it.

Q: Uh-huh.

R: And then that's, no, they know it's just about ripe when it gets like that.

Q: And if it isn't good, then how do they refer to the grain?

R: Well, it just, it may, it's just "thin" tobacco when it's

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not good. It thickens-up when it's, when it's real good tobacco.

Q: We didn't talk about grain, did we, yesterday?

RESPONDENT II: No, uh-uh.

R: But it does grain-up, it does.

R II: Yes, it does. Why, that would be my idea of it, uh-huh. There's so many things you leave out.

R: Yes, that's right. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah, it grains-up. (all three laugh) And then it grains-up and ...

Q: Grains-up. It's a good one.

R: And then it, you say it's ripe. It's dropped-over and it's grained-up and thickened-up and it's ripe. Then they split the stalk, they to in the fields, and ...

Q: Now which, when do they split them on, the ...

R: That's the one-sucker.

Q: That's the one-sucker.

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R: That's right. Now on the burly there, I'm talking about one-sucker altogether. Now burly is a little bit different type.

Q: You described that one-sucker. I think we talked about burly yesterday and ...

R: And then at, they split the stalk. They take a tobacco knife which is a straight blade. It's just, it has a handle at the top with the knife at the bottom and it has a straight blade on it. And split the stalk and lay it over. And let it wilt.

Q: And let it wilt. Out in the fields?

R: Out in the field. And then they pick it up and put about some, I'd say some six to eight plants on a stick. And hang it on scaffolds in the barn. I mean in the fields.

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Q: In the fields?

R: In the fields.

Q: Scaffolding.

R: Uh-huh. Ours was so big this time it had to be wilted in the fields because they never would've gotten to the barn with it.

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Q: Oh really?

R: Oh, it was huge this time.

Q: () a very good crop then.

R: Uh-huh. And they let it wilt in the fields. And then after they let it wilt in the field, they, when they think it has yellowed enough, it kind of yellows, against the yellow. Why they haul it to the barn and hang it in the barn.

Q: Does it also lose weight?

R: Yes, mm-hmm. Yes, the water evaporates from it.

Q: That water, uh-huh.

R: See, it's got a lot of water in it. Especially this year. And that water evaporates. And then they take it to the barn in, and if it's a good drying spell, why they, it just hangs there and it dries-out. And cures-out. And when it has completely cured-out,...

Q: Cures-out.

R: ...why, we say it "comes in order". We have a lot of people say (). (laughs). Comes in order!

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Q: Do they say they ()?

R: Up in the northern part of Kentucky they say "come into () ", but we say "in order".

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Q: I see.

R: And then when it has, oh, I would say about, we hardly ever start stripping, it'll, just hangs there and cures, and cures, and it'll come in order with (), but ...

Q: But do they "kill" it?

R: No, there's no such thing! (laughs) It just cures! And then when it has completely cured-up, why long about the last of November, December, we start stripping it. And we take it down out of the barn, and we have what we have a stripping room. And lay it on this long table, and then they clamp it. They take a, the first man takes what they call the "lugs" off, and the second man takes the seconds, and the third takes the "good".

Q: The "good"? What do they call that?

R: Least tobacco, the least, that's right. The least, call it. And then when they have placed it out, and then they tie it up in hands. And there's, I would say there's about ten to twelve leaves to the hand. And they tie it, those, together. And then after they have got it clasped, they book it down in a long book.

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Q: Long in the, where it ...

R: Uh-huh, where it comes down. So you get to () ten. (laughs) A book, and then when they get it booked-down, they take it to market and sell it. And that's when they put it on the baskets to sell.

Q: They put it on the baskets.

R: And auction-off. That's when they auction it off.

Q: It's a great day.