

A man with a mustache, wearing a blue baseball cap and a white polo shirt, is shown in profile, smelling a large pile of cured tobacco leaves. The cap has a patch that reads "Watson HYBRIDS". The background is filled with more tobacco leaves hanging from racks.

The Flue Cured Tobacco Farmer

Va NC SC

December 1982

The sweet smell of \$2 tobacco

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*27 in some editions

Cover photo by Chris Bickers

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If you hold a handful of cured leaf close to your face and breathe into it, tobacco buyers say, the aroma that is reflected back will give you an idea, if you know what to look for, of the flavor that the tobacco will eventually carry into the cigarette that is made from it. In our cover photo, Dwight Watson, who grows flue-cured near Gold Rock, N.C., demonstrates the technique on some of the tobacco he grew this season. The buyers liked the smell of Watson's crop; in a year when a quarter of the total production of flue-cured went to Stabilization, every bit of Watson's crop found a purchaser, and the average price was over two dollars. Editor Chris Bickers visited Watson's farm in November to learn how he produced such a crop. You can read the full details in our cover story beginning on page 10.

Rootknot damage once again caused considerable dollar losses for many of you in 1982, after several years of good control. Resistant varieties have fallen victim and contact nematicides haven't worked for some like they used to. Why? You can find out by turning to "The new rootknot problem . . . and what you can do about it," starting on page six.

Also in this issue, we profile Roy B. Davis Jr., a Virginian who has been instrumental in improving the tobacco marketing system. His candid opinions on today's problems and his suggested solutions may help in shaping tomorrow's policies. They often have before. See page 19.

Keep in mind that the referendum on the tobacco program, which must be approved by farmers and allotment owners every three years, is coming up in December. The farmer leaders of Stabilization and Tobacco Associates would like you to cast a vote. See their comments on page 16.

And see also page 30 for Chris Bickers' commentary on whether a price freeze would jeopardize Stabilization's future chances of selling that part of the 1982 crop that went into the pool.

A final note, and a sad one: A colleague of ours, Cathy Younts Hilker, died in November. She had served as a member of the advertising sales staff of this magazine and its sister publication, the Peanut Farmer, from the summer of 1979 through the winter of 1981, when she transferred to a similar position with another magazine within this organization. Her friends—and everyone she knew in this business was a friend—will remember her for her cheery voice and easy laughter. We, her co-workers, will remember her that way.

Primings

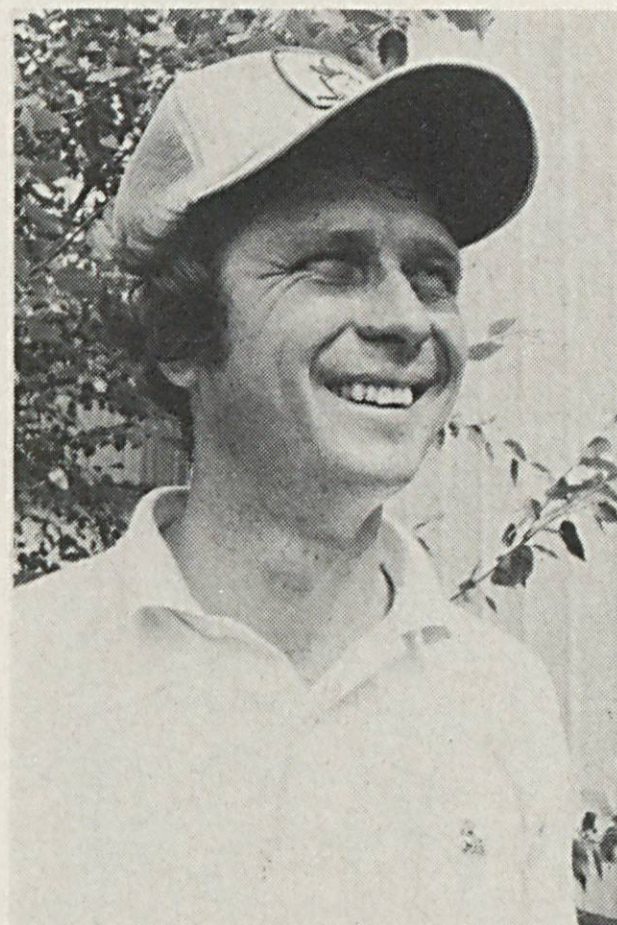
Solid planting is the way to go, believes Bobby Ham (photo) of Greene County, N.C. "I get more efficient use of my sucker control chemicals on my solid-planted tobacco," he explains. "I get more uniform coverage with these chemicals, too. The result is that I get very uniform tobacco with no suckers."

You don't have to stay up all night stoking wood to cure with a hot water boiler, says George Mainor (photo) of Duplin County, N.C. If your boiler is big enough for the number of barns you have, and if the heat exchangers inside the barns are big enough, you won't have to fire the boiler during the night, he explains. Mainor built a hot water system to cure his four barns last year and is convinced it's been a savior to his operation.

There's a trend in France and its former colonies away from the dark tobacco cigarettes traditionally popular to "blond," or American blend, cigarettes, which contain some flue-cured. "This trend offers some potential for sale of American flue-cured," says Charlie King, secretary-treasurer of Tobacco Associates. "We are looking at the possibility of establishing some sort of promotional program with the French and possibly looking again at the Algerian market." If you farm in North or South Carolina, you will have a chance to vote on your Tobacco Associates assessment at the same time you vote on continuation of the program.

Please freeze! Martin Bueckmann, leaf manager of Brinkmann Tobacco Company of Germany, told an audience of tobacco farmers in Rocky Mount, N.C., in September that as far as the German market is concerned, American flue-cured will be "very, very soon at the end of the road." He added, "I think it would be good to freeze the support price for one year...If you would accept a freeze, it would put your tobacco closer to the market. Your tobacco is the most desirable in the world for us. We like it, we need it. But if you price it too high, we cannot afford it any more."

The relative strength of the dollar seriously limited Germany purchases this season. "We are dealing with a very bad exchange rate," said Bueckmann. If the price had remained the same in 1982 as in 1981, he said, the actual cost would still have been about 30 percent more. Overall, Bueckmann described the 1982 crop as comparable to most recent flue-cured crops.



Ham



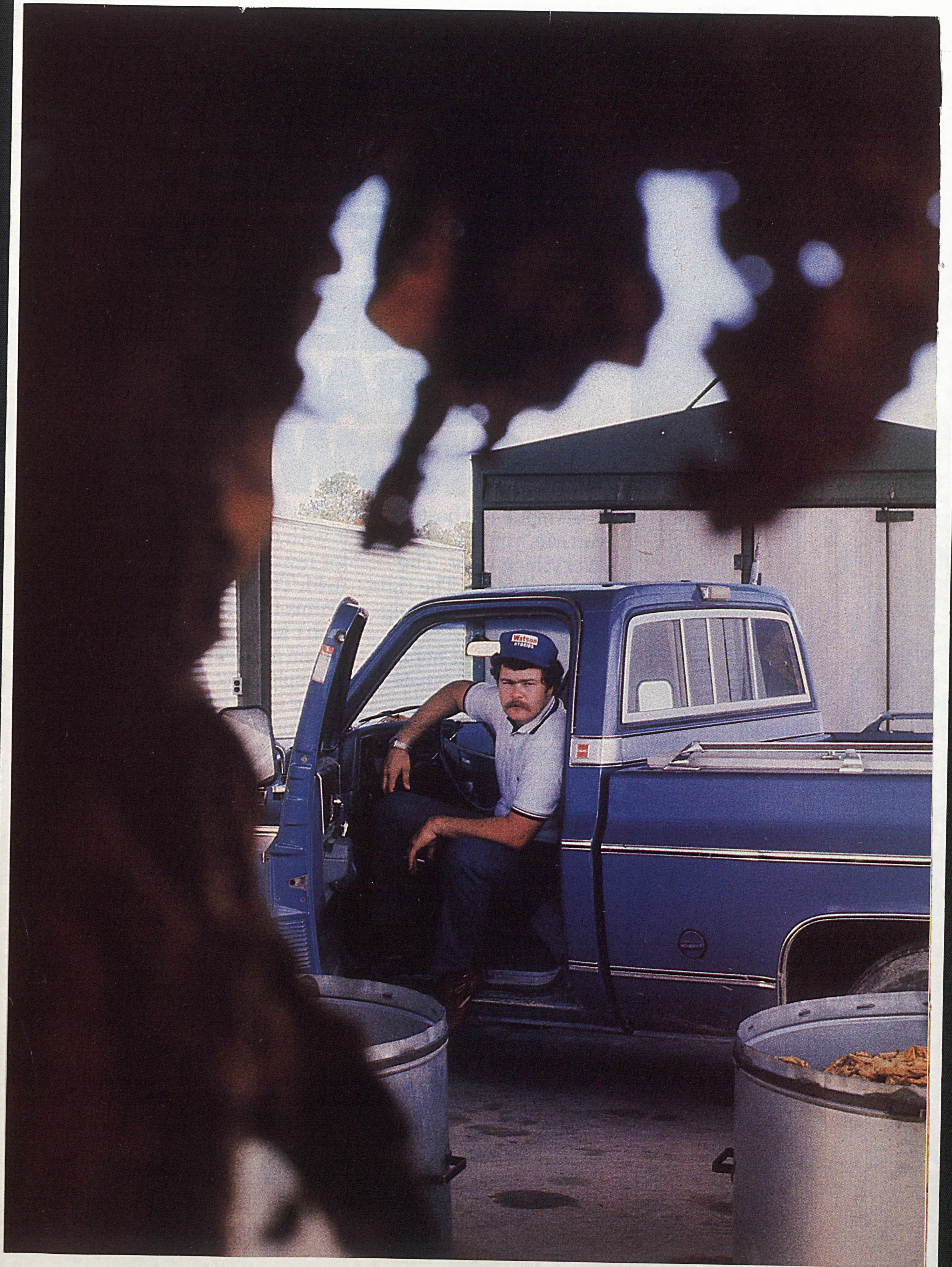
Mainor

What do U.S. manufacturers think of the 1982 crop? The general feeling seems to be that it was about average or a little below. Heavy rains in South Carolina and eastern North Carolina caused some thinness, especially in the primings, but this was somewhat offset by a crop in the Old and Middle Belts that was better than in most recent years. There was also excellent leaf in Georgia and Florida, especially from the middle of the stalk up.

A series of seminars for a selected group of 25 farmers from across the flue-cured belt will begin early next year at North Carolina State University. The Philip Morris Agricultural Leadership Program will consist of 11 seminars held over a two-year period plus a week-long study tour to Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Va., and a visit to a foreign country which produces and exports flue-cured tobacco. Growers of flue-cured from all states will be considered. Nomination and reference forms will be available from county Extension offices. You must be between the ages of 25 and 45.

A chanting pack of 72 contestants gathered in Danville, Va., in October to vie for the 1982 Tobacco Auctioneering Championship, and Page Roberts emerged victorious. He's the second champion in as many years from Clarksville, Va., succeeding Mac Burnette.

Three N.C. Extension agents will receive graduate training this year courtesy of Philip Morris USA. Peter Hight, Lee Co.; Ken Reeves, Buncombe Co.; and Scott Shoulars, Rockingham Co. county, will attend NCSU for one semester to explore new research information.



How to grow a cropful of two-dollar tobacco

. . . and not send a pound to Stabilization

by Chris Bickers

If any doubts remained that managing tobacco for top quality can pay off handsomely at the marketplace, they've been laid to rest for good by a young North Carolina farmer.

The farmer, Dwight Watson, planted 100 acres of tobacco last spring on the family-owned corporate farm he manages near Gold Rock in the Coastal Plain of eastern North Carolina. When the marketing season ended and sales figures were tallied up, they showed that Watson had sold 236,867 pounds from these acres for a total receipt of \$483,089.11, an average of right at \$2.04.

And all of Watson's tobacco attracted a buyer: None of his 1982 production was purchased by Stabilization. The only tobacco Watson sent to the Flue Cured Stabilization Corporation this year was the poundage that he produced in excess of 110 percent of his quota; he chose to place that tobacco in Stabilization's carryover pool, although he's had good indications that he could sell most of it right now for two dollars or more if regulations allowed him to.

Now, if your reaction to all this is one of skepticism, I can't really blame you. To tell the truth, when I first learned late in October of Watson's success at the market, I was skeptical too, even though I've often interviewed his father, seedsman George Watson, and found him to be a reliable source of accurate information.

But that big of a crop bringing that high of a price and all of it moving into the trade? I couldn't help but feel dubious.

So I set out to see if I could corroborate this report independently. I interviewed one witness after another who had seen the crop, including some who had bought parts of it, and every one of them told me the same thing: Dwight Watson produced an outstanding crop, one well deserving of a very high average grade and one that filled a demand that American farmers haven't been meeting very well in recent years.

Brooks Skinner, a retired tobacco buyer now living in Rocky Mount, N.C., visited Watson's farm late in October as Watson was

sheeting up his carryover tobacco.

"What I saw was a fine lot of tobacco with apparent characteristics of the old-fashioned standard varieties of past years," Skinner reported. "The tobacco was being transferred from bulk barn racks to sheets when I arrived, and it was the most uniform lot of tobacco from every standpoint that I've seen in many a day.

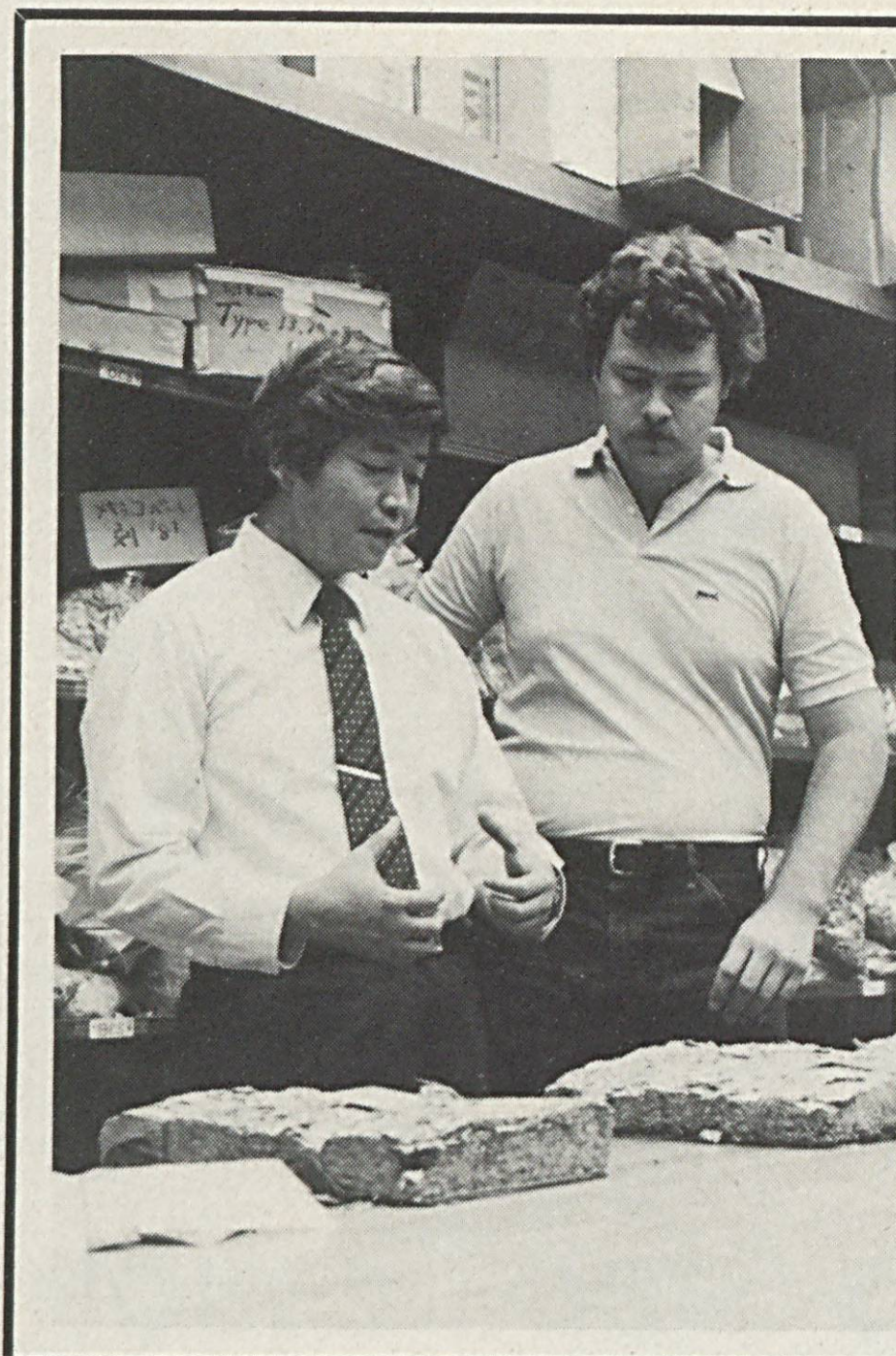
"It had a good, solid, rich color, plenty of body and such fine cutting quality that I'm sure it would shred with the shine and brilliance that is so badly needed to bolster our foreign trade."

Skinner was particularly impressed with the obvious flavor of Watson's tobacco.

"The flavor characteristics of Watson's tobacco were very evident. You could cup the leaves in your hands and warm them with your breath and they would smell like flavor 'gone to bed'—that is, you could tell all the flavor in the world was right there, just waiting to come out.

Watson's management practices also caught Skinner's attention.

"You could tell that this young



Mature leaf is what Japanese buyers are looking for, explains Katsuhiko Hirata, a representative of the Japanese Tobacco and Salt Company. "There are other factors: texture, color, body. But the most important factor is maturity." He found favor with Watson's crop this year, saying "it has the filling capacity, the aroma and the taste we need."

farmer took intense pride in his work. The tobacco in the racks was exceptionally clean, and as uniform as peas in a pod.

"He had had the patience to allow his crop to mature. It had been hand-primed under good supervision, handled properly and cured expertly. It was ripe, grainy and filled out all the way to the butts with no trace of green in the leaf. The farm employees were very careful to continue to throw out 'wasty' leaves, of which there was only a very small percentage."

The tobacco Skinner observed was part of the overproduction Watson sent to Stabilization. But it nonetheless appeared to him to be highly saleable. "I am sure that many companies would have been glad for the chance to bid on the carryover tobacco that Watson delivered to the pool," says Skinner.

An executive with an exporting firm that bought some of Watson's crop confirmed Skinner's assessment. "We would have liked to have purchased far more from his crop than we were able to," says A.P. Thorpe of Thorpe-Greenville Export Tobacco Company. "The tobacco he delivered to the market was a very saleable tobacco that is much in demand by our foreign customers. It was rich, ripe and flavor-

ful, with aroma and nicotine content.

"He had marketed it properly with good presentation, and buyers didn't have to worry about nesting."

Thorpe pointed out that Watson's tobacco had obviously been harvested at the point of optimum ripeness and maturity. This made it stand out even in comparison with other tobacco that had received the same grade. "There are B3Fs and there are B3Fs," notes Thorpe.

Katsuhiko Hirata, a representative of the Japan Tobacco and Salt Company, visited Watson's farm during harvest and found that his tobacco was just what Japanese manufacturers are looking for.

"We want to have top quality tobacco from the market floor," says Hirata, who is currently stationed in Raleigh, N.C. "Especially we are looking for good maturity—this is number one.

"There are other factors: texture, color, body. But the most important factor is maturity."

Hirata was impressed with Watson's production practices. "He is always thinking that quality equals success. He grows his tobacco very carefully and pays close attention to it every day. It has the filling capacity, the aroma and the taste that we need."

What can you learn from Watson's experience? Although he mar-

shalled all his resources and directed them toward the goal of quality, hardly any of his practices are beyond the reach of any of you reading this.

A few things that really stand out among Watson's practices:

- He planted high-quality varieties, mostly NC-82 along with some PD-4, NC-79 and VA-182.

- He harvested by hand, and he harvested frequently, a total of six times; and he successfully communicated to his harvest crew the importance of not mixing stalk positions.

- He cut back on his acreage, from 125 acres in 1980 to 100 acres this year, to bring it into better balance with the capacity of his 14 150-rack Powell barns.

- He developed a curing program that gives optimum control of humidity and ventilation.

- He devoted extra effort to preparing his tobacco for market in uniform, highly presentable sheets.

- Most important of all, he determined to harvest only ripe, mature tobacco, even when it sometimes appeared to be more desirable from the standpoint of labor and equipment management to harvest it a little green.

There was a moment last summer when he realized he had a tough decision to make.

"It was the beginning of the second week of August, and we had just finished our second priming and were starting the third. We pulled one or two barns of tobacco that looked ripe in the field, but when we put it in the barn, it wasn't ripe and mature like I wanted it. I went out and looked at it, and it was right on the borderline of ripe and not ripe, and all the other fields around were not as far along.

"So we sat on it for seven or eight days. I let my workers take some time off or work on something else. Some of them weren't sure that was a good idea.

"But tobacco is like tomatoes or figs. There's a point where it reaches complete ripeness, and if you wait to harvest until then, it will have the grain and the guts and the body and

the oil in it.

"Now when we started up again, we had some long days ahead of us, those last weeks of August and the first week of September. But because our curing facilities were in good balance with our production, we were able to handle it."

That's another area in which Watson thinks he's made a management improvement. He took over full-time management of the farm's tobacco crop in 1980, and that year he averaged \$1.34 on 245,500 pounds he grew on 125 acres. He was disappointed.

"I looked at what we were doing, and it seemed like barn space was the biggest single problem. When all our tobacco seemed ready to come ripe, we had to go ahead and harvest for fear that we wouldn't have enough barns to cure if we waited."

In 1981, he cut back to 113 acres, and his market average on 225,000 pounds was a much more satisfying \$1.80. This past year, he made the cut back to 100 acres, which, by the way, represents only 90 percent of his allotment. He thinks this represents the right balance of barn space to acreage.

There's another factor that Watson ranks very high in producing a quality crop, and that is an efficient and motivated work force. "On this operation, 90 percent of our success is because of our people. In harvesting ripe, mature tobacco, for instance, the easiest place to grade is in the field.

"But to do that, your harvest crew has to be willing to pass by any leaves that are still a little green or that have burned up. Ours will do that."

The production program that resulted in a cropful of two dollar tobacco goes like this: He starts off by choosing seed from high-quality varieties, seed he has produced himself for his family's seed business. His choices for 1982 were NC-82 (60 acres), PD-4 (25 acres), NC-79 (12 acres) and VA-182 (three acres).

His yield goal this year was 2,400 pounds; the actual yield was close

to 2,700.

Plantbed sites are surrounded by trees, well drained and close enough to a water supply for irrigation. Watson gasses the beds with methyl bromide, then applies 50 to 60 pounds of 12-6-6, using a fluffer to get it into the top inch and a half. Between January 15 and February 15, he sows. "We mix our seed with Bulldog soda, spread it, spray with Enide and Ridomil, spread some wheat straw, and irrigate to put the seed in the ground," says Watson, who covers the beds with plastic.

"The most important thing you can do in the plantbed, I've learned, is to keep the plants growing and keep them tender. That's especially important with NC-82."

As transplanting nears, Watson gets the land ready by using a land plane on it, then breaking it with a moldboard plow. He disks once, then double disks in a tank mix of Ridomil, Tillam and Mocap and beds it up in 48-inch rows.

When he's ready to pull, he and his workers wash their hands in milk and refrain from smoking. The plants are pulled selectively and rigorously selected again at the field. "We grade out the hard ones and any other poor ones that we find," he says.

He sets out plants with a 12-man crew—eight on the transplanter, two walking behind, a supervisor and a driver—and as he transplants, he applies 100 pounds of 16-0-0 to both sides of the plant.

He plows within 10 days, not so much to shape the beds as to put the fertilizer out. He applies his complete fertilizer—a bulk blend of 6-6-18 this year—in two applications, putting out at least half on the first trip. The amount of fertilizer varies depending on the variety; for NC-82, he applied a total of 72 to 75 pounds of nitrogen, which meant about 1,000 pounds of the 6-6-18 in addition to the 16 units he had applied at transplanting.

He plows frequently, both for weed control and also to help control ground suckers.

When he begins chemical sucker control, he follows the Fairmont Chemical Company program of two

applications of the contact Fair 85 followed five to seven days later with FST-7, a contact containing maleic hydrazide. He feels confident that MH residues in his tobacco are minimal.

Although he had plenty of rain this year, he is equipped to irrigate. He uses a Hobbs hose-tow unit for most of his tobacco, all except some that is grown under a center pivot system.

In the latter part of June of most years, he starts harvesting. He runs two Long self-propelled harvesters, each with eight workers. One man hauls the leaf back to the barn and returns with the empty trailers. There are two workers at the barns plus a supervisor for the whole operation, a total of 20.

He starts the cure by taking the temperature from 90 to 100 degrees at two degrees an hour. He holds it at 100 degrees for 48 hours, then works the temperature to 110 or 118 degrees, then to 135 degrees. I never get over 160 degrees in killing out the stems. Any higher and it would turn on the red side. And I never get over 135 until the leaf is dry."

The point to be made here is that Watson proved that this situation doesn't have to continue. You can produce tobacco of a high enough quality to merit the support price or better. You don't have to send a quarter of your crop to the cooperative and finance the sale of enormous inventories.

I asked the Japanese representative Hirata if two dollars seemed a fair price for Watson's tobacco. He had to hedge his answer a bit, pointing out that his company's official policy is that the American pricing mechanism has led to a support level that is too high. But even so, his conclusion had to be, "In this year, for tobacco of the quality he produces, I would think that \$2.04 was a reasonable price."

It's a price that certainly offers any American grower a reasonable opportunity for profit. The lesson to be learned from Watson's two dollar crop? As he frequently says, quality equals success. Go after it. □

New rootknot problem

continued from page 7

recommends.

Fumigation has its drawbacks. The fumigants have to be shanked in and bedded up three weeks before you set. Since the soil temperature has to be over 50 degrees for them to be effective, a cold, wet spring could cause you problems. Fumigation would delay your whole operation in those years.

Fall fumigation could help solve the problem, except that no one is sure its effect would last through the winter to the following spring. Tests in South Carolina and North Carolina this year will try to answer that.

"We think that fall fumigation could be effective, but it would cost more than spring fumigation since it requires a higher rate to do the job," says Paul Krausz, S.C. Extension plant disease specialist. "We're not sure fall fumigation will ever be practical, or even if fumigation is the only answer to the peanut rootknot problem."

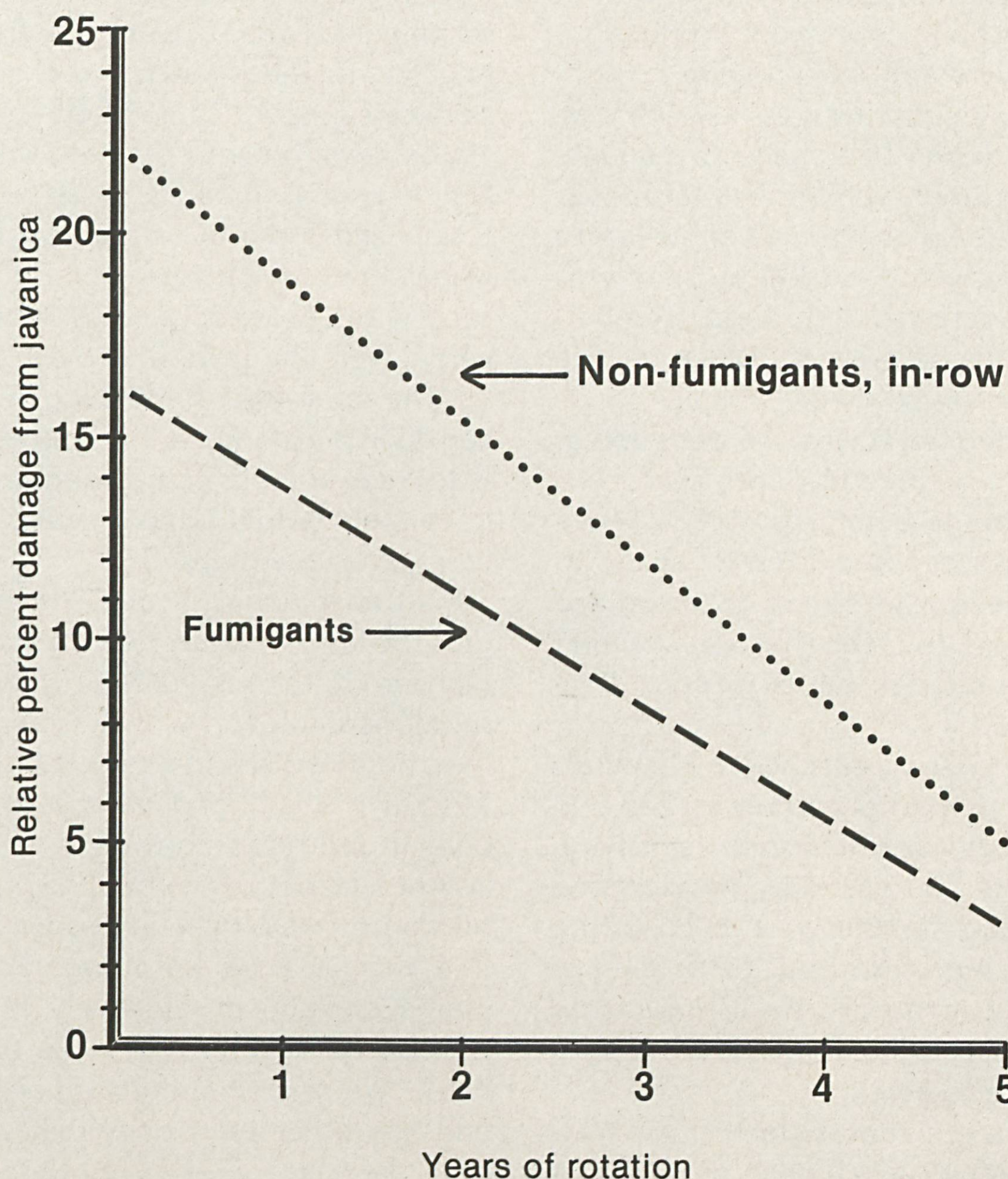
"Other chemicals, such as Nemacur or Nemacur/Dasanit will work for some, but if there's a lot of peanut rootknot out there, the grower may have to fumigate."

Fumigation is less expensive than applying a contact nematicide if applied in the spring at normal rates. Those who've experienced the new rootknot will tell you it's worth every penny it costs you. "You can't afford to cut costs if you've got a bad javanese or peanut rootknot problem," says Arnett.

Even with fumigation, you can't expect to rid your field of these nematodes in just one year. In fact, you'll probably have to use chemical treatments from then on.

Don't rely entirely on any of these chemicals to control the new rootknot. You'll need to keep alternating varieties resistant to the Southern rootknot with others, and using the best rotation program you can. And even then

How chemical treatments and rotation work together to help control the javanese rootknot in Florida.



you'll have to expect some level of damage. The peanut and javanese rootknot species are very destructive once they're unleashed in your fields.

"It takes fewer of the javanese than the Southern rootknot to do the same damage," says Jimmy Rich, Florida nematode specialist. "It's like comparing a big muscle-bound guy to a weakling."

"Just because you fumigate for javanica doesn't mean you won't still have some rootknot damage," he emphasizes. "In fact, in-row fumigation is starting to lose its effectiveness in Florida. Broadcast fumigation is the better alternative."

Rotation can help, but not a great deal unless you can afford to put the field in a grass crop such as bermudagrass, bahiagrass or

wheat for three to four years, says Rich. Other crops are only so-so in rotational value.

Corn isn't too effective because the javanese and peanut rootknot can reproduce on its roots. Many soybean varieties carry no resistance and are of little value. Cotton is acceptable since none of these rootknot species attack its roots.

All in all, most of you will have to rely primarily, though not totally, on fumigants, or possibly Nemacur/Dasanit, if you have one of the new rootknot species and hope to make a good crop.

It doesn't really seem to matter whether it's the peanut or javanese rootknot that attacks your tobacco. They're both extremely destructive, and are controlled by the same methods. □