

Tobacco Festival Draws Officials, Awards Are Presented During Greenville Event

By RICHARD WHITING
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GREENVILLE — Dwight Watson, a local tobacco farmer, was named tobacco farmer of the year during last night's awards banquet of the fifth annual Southern Flue-Cured Tobacco Festival in Greenville. (See related photo on page 1)

Among those present Tuesday to congratulate Watson were guest speakers Congressman Charlie Whitley (Third District) and Sen. John East as well as Jim Graham, commissioner of agriculture.

Congressman William C. Wampler, of Virginia, was scheduled to deliver the keynote address, but due to his defeat in the recent elections, Whitley, a Greenville native, spoke in his place.

Whitley spoke on the topic of the politics of tobacco—what he termed his "area of specialty"—and the recent external and internal attacks being launched against the tobacco program.

He reminded the nearly-300 people gathered of the narrow margin by which the tobacco program was saved this year with the development of the nonet cost amendments.

The amendments, he said, provides that nonfarming entities be required to sell allotments which are separate and apart from the land; authorizes other allotment holders to sell apart from land, thereby setting pricing on allotment sales in the future; gives the

secretary of agriculture limited authorization to adjust the price support formula (to reduce the increase below what it would have been); gives the growers association the authority to levy grower assessments per pound to be paid into the association creating a loss reserve at three cents per pound.

The support price has good and bad effects as Whitley noted it kept the price of tobacco high this year, putting an average of 25 percent of the flue-cured offerings in the co-op under loan. This resulted in 12 percent interest being paid to the government for the holdings. Another such market year where the co-op takes a high percentage of the offerings will be damaging, he said.

Whitley noted that congress was "forced" to implement changes in the tobacco program through the no-net cost amendments, but added that in the 47-year history of the tobacco program, it has operated "at virtually no cost" and has sold at prices high enough to pay the commodity credit loan.

"Tobacco faces two serious problems," Whitley said. They are the external attacks in Washington, D.C. aimed at abolishing the whole tobacco program and internal problems with regard to a question of freezing support prices at 1982 levels. Additionally, he said, discussion of holding quotas at their present level is involved.

Whitley said that the support price is "blowing us off the (export) market." Export dealers would like to buy more tobacco, but at lower prices, making export of U.S. tobacco easier.

Freezing of support prices will require legislative action, Whitley said, but that could add fuel to the enemies' attacks in Washington through "crippling amendments."

Whitley said the tobacco community needs to be heard in Washington, D.C. for internal protection of the program. He added that on Dec. 16 the flue-cured program will be voted on by referendum and needs a two-thirds approval to be continued.

Whitley said there are no easy answers in the struggle to keep the tobacco program alive. The proposed quota reduction and support price freeze could be beneficial in the long run, he indicated, but the stabilization board's high prices could be damaging to growers.

East: Unity

Sen. John East spoke briefly on the need for "all the unity we can possibly muster" in retaining the tobacco program.

He noted that now, in the United States, there exists the greatest opposition to the tobacco industry; there is "enormous hostility" toward tobacco.

"I understand the importance of tobacco to the well-being of the state" and nation, East said. For that reason, he said, there is a strong need for unity within the industry as well as a need for partisan unity.

East pointed out that he, a

Republican, and Whitley, a Democrat, are examples of opposite party members who are united in the struggle for tobacco's survival.

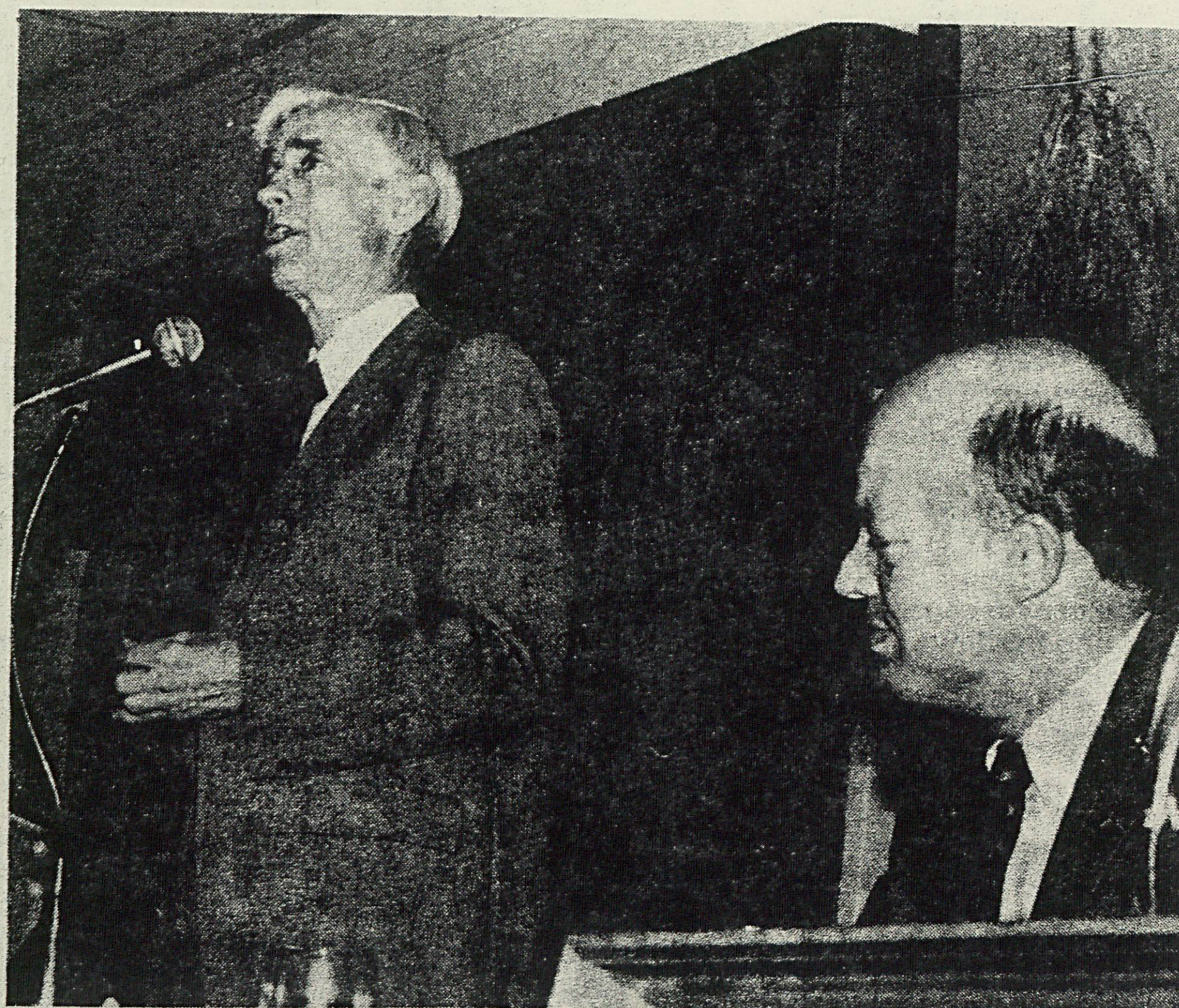
"If we can have unity of parties we can prevail," he said, adding that "the enemy in Washington would like to divide" the unity. East also said that tobacco is the "top priority issue" in his office and that he has spent most of his time on this one issue through one-on-one lobbying among his colleagues.

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER — Third district Congressman Charlie Whitley was keynote speaker at last night's awards banquet of the Southern Flue-Cured Tobacco

Festival. Republican Sen. John East, right, also addressed the group at the Greenville Country Club. (Sowers photo)

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WINNER — Dwight Watson (at podium), president and general manager of Gold Rock Farms Inc., was named Tobacco Farmer of the Year at the fifth annual Southern Flue-Cured Tobacco Festival awards banquet last night. Watson summed up his success with a

three-word phrase, "Quality equals success." Watson grew 100 acres of tobacco, none of which, it should be noted, was placed in stabilization. Pictured from left to right are Sam Bundy, emcee, Watson, Cong. Charlie Whitley and Sen. John East. (Sowers photo)