

# George B. Watson: Seed F

By Bill Humphries  
Farm Editor

"We must adapt to change," says George Benedict Watson, owner and operator of Watson Seed Farms in the Gold Rock community of Nash County, nine miles northwest of Rocky Mount.

As a modern farmer he has seen much change in the past few decades. But he thinks the next 10 years will be "the fastest moving in agriculture yet."

He believes that within three years, Uncle Sam will be asking farmers to produce more, rather than restricting their output. Why? Because a hungry and ill-clad world is crying for food and fiber, and only this nation has the capability to produce it.

### Range of Interests

While directly and deeply involved in agriculture, Watson has a broad range of interests. He lives by the conviction that every individual should devote part of his time to serving the community.

Under his chairmanship over three years, the Nash County Citizens Committee for Better Schools developed long-range plans for making the schools of that rural county comparable to city schools. Among other things, elementary schools are being consolidated and three new high schools are being constructed, with the first already open and the second slated to open this fall.

C. H. Fries, Nash school superintendent, says Watson "has been a big help to us in our school program."

Early this year Watson was installed as president of the 21-county East Carolina Council, Boy Scouts of America, which conducts a program involving some 16,000 boys. The council has started a drive to raise \$366,000 to acquire property and build a camp on the Pamlico River in Beaufort County.

A former chairman of the Tar River Scout District and holder of the silver beaver award, George was a scout in his youth but couldn't become an eagle because he was not a qualified swimmer. At Oak Ridge Military Institute, however, he participated in water polo, was a

member of the winning team—and mastered the art of swimming.

Later he completed the American Red Cross water safety instructor's course and thus became qualified to teach all types of water safety. He has taught hundreds of boys to swim.

In 1959 Watson's son Dwight, then 6 years old, was hit by a truck while he was riding a motor scooter. The father, a witness to the accident, rushed to the boy, whose small and still body appeared lifeless.

Watson applied mouth-to-mouth artificial respiration, and soon the little fellow was breathing normally again. Dramatically, Dad's training in safety had enabled him to save the boy's life.

George has firm faith in the scouting program and believes it is needed more today than ever before.

Born at Bennettsville, S.C., Nov. 21, 1919, George is a son of the late Van S. Watson and Mrs. Ruth Benedict Watson. He has one brother, Van, now in the insurance business at Gold Rock, and one sister, Ruth, now Mrs. Fate Everett of Palmyra. The family moved to Nash County when George was six months of age.

After attending schools at Rocky Mount, George completed the junior college business administration course at Oak Ridge in 1938. Later he attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for two years before entering the Army Air Corps in 1942.

A year later his father died and he was released from service to return to Nash County and manage the home farm. He has been engaged in farming ever since.

### Owens Company

He was executive vice president and general manager of Watson Seed Farms Inc., from the time it was organized in 1945 until 1964, when he became president. Last year he purchased his brother Van's interest in the seed business and also obligated himself to buy his mother's third, which went to his sister. George is now owner and manager of the company.

As a young man George became interested in a charm-

ing Rocky Mount girl, Martha Anne Speight, daughter of the late Dr. J. Ambler Speight. But when they got around to talking about marriage, they couldn't agree on where they should live. He wanted to take her to the country; she wanted to remain in town.

Finally, to break the impasse, George bought a lot in Rocky Mount and the couple made this agreement: They would try living in the country for a year. Then, if Martha Anne didn't like it, they would build on their lot and move to town.

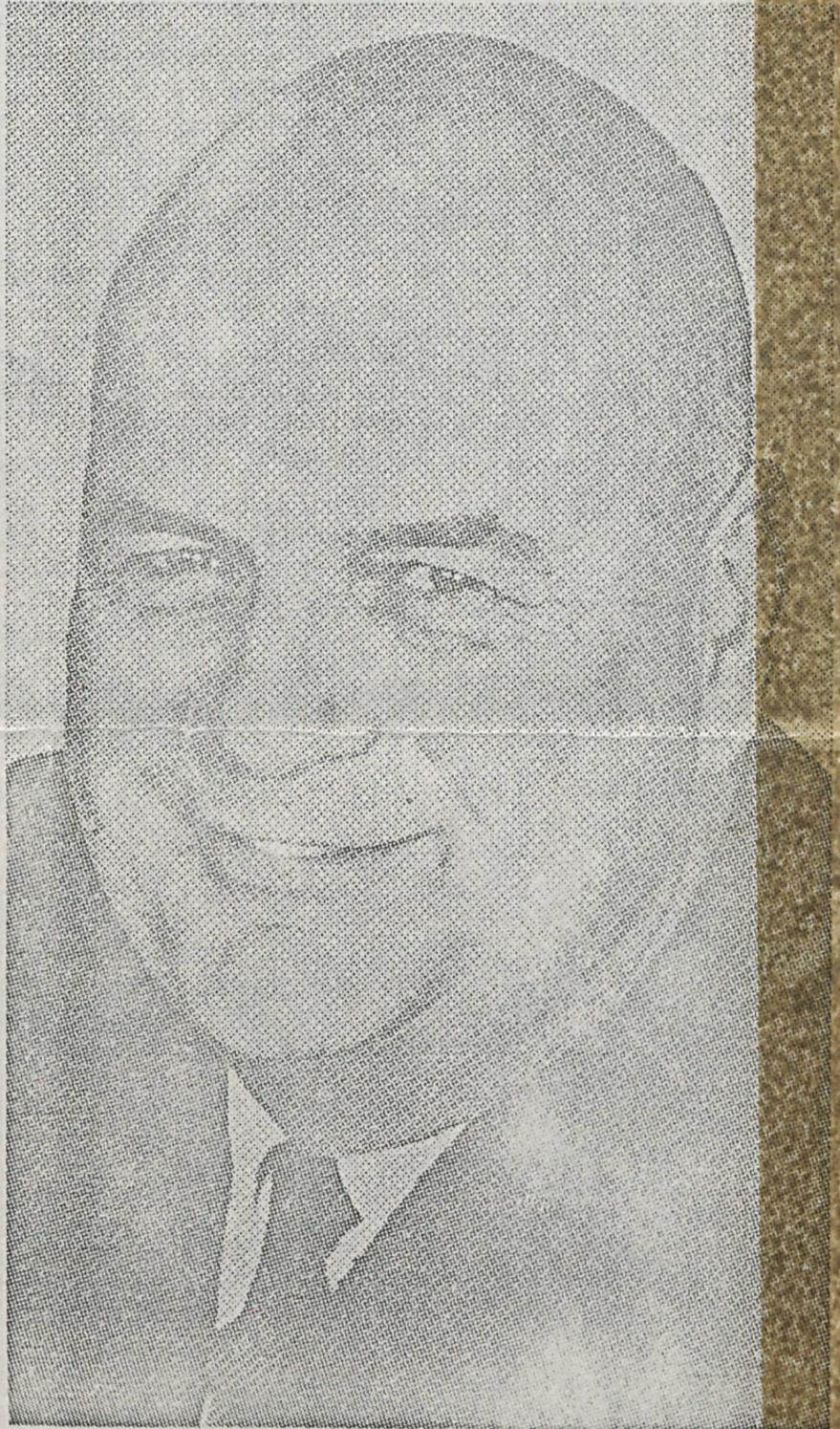
That was almost 22 years ago. They're still living in the country—and nobody enjoys it more than does Martha Anne.

There are five Watson children. George Jr., 20, is a sophomore at North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount. The only daughter, Martha

Anne, 17, is a senior at Rocky Mount High School. Twin boys, Jim and Gene, 15, and the youngest, Dwight, 13, are students at Edwards Junior High, Rocky Mount.

With some 750 acres of good farm land, Watson is engaged primarily in the production of hybrid corn seed and tobacco seed. The tobacco allotment this year is about 60 acres. He will produce some 350 acres of seed corn on his own land; other farmers will produce approximately 750 acres for him under contract.

The firm does plant breeding and research not only in Nash County but also at its Homestead, Fla. winter nursery. The staff includes a registered plant breeder. Top personnel have been with the company an average of 10 years. Most of the tenant families have been around for 20 years or longer.



Staff Photo by Ed Ghebo

George Benedict Watson

# The News and Observer

SECTION III

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*Car Head of the Week*

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The total seed farm operation involves about 20 families and thus makes a sizable contribution to the area's economy.

The seed corn trade name "Watson Hybrids" has been well accepted. The corn lines are well adapted to mechanization and produce high yields. The firm is developing new hybrids and new tobacco varieties for future release.

### Cattle and Grain

The farm each year feeds out some 190 head of beef cattle, using home-grown feed. About 100 acres of small grain are grown in rotation.

Long active in Farm Bureau, Watson was serving last year as chairman of the Nash unit's tobacco advisory committee when the fate of the acreage-poundage proposal was hanging in the balance. Accompanied by a score of fellow Farm Bureau members, he went to Washington to speak strongly in favor of the plan before a Senate subcommittee and to confer with Harold D. Cooley, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, whose home is in Nash. Until then, Cooley had been lukewarm toward acreage-poundage; later he gave the legislation his full support.

Watson believes adoption of acreage-poundage "changed our sense of direction and saved the tobacco growing industry." The next major step needed, he says, is to develop orderly marketing of the crop, for price stability throughout the season and for maximum returns to growers. He cautions that "give and take on all sides will be needed" if orderly marketing is to be achieved.

Startlingly, he predicts that getting enough tobacco produced may be a problem five to 10 years from now.

"Under present methods of production, we may not be able to keep enough labor on the farm to grow the tobacco needed. For the most part we're still harvesting the crop the same way it was done 100 years ago."

The answer, he feels, lies in mechanization, and the key to mechanizing the tobacco harvest is bulk curing. In his view, the issue boils itself down to this simple choice: Mechanize or quit growing.

George favors the sale and transfer of allotments in tobacco, as already provided for in cotton.

"Withing 10 years the average size tobacco farm will be growing 25 to 30 acres, some up to 50 or even 100 acres. That's the kind of unit that will be needed," he says. At present the average flue-cured allotment is less than four acres.

He is encouraged by the fact that automatic curing became a reality in research tests last year at Oxford and at Tifton, Ga., where the barn doors were kept locked throughout the curing process.

He is president of Farmers Tobacco Warehouse, Rocky Mount, and is a member of the State Farm Bureau's flue-cured tobacco advisory committee. He was president of the Farm Bureau in Nash for four years.

He was president of the North Carolina Crop Improvement Association in 1959 and 1960 and is a charter member and former president of the North Carolina Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, which honored him as the "outstanding farm manager" of 1960. In addition, he is a member of the advisory council to the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences of N. C. State University and is a former chairman of the State advisory committee to the Farmers Home Administration. He also has actively assisted the program of the Coastal Plain Planning and Development Commission, of which he is former vice chairman and currently a member of the board of directors.

Watson is active in Rocky Mount's Church of the Good Shepherd and has served as a member of the vestry or governing board. He is a trustee of the Oak Ridge Foundation, which has dropped the junior college program and is converting the institution into a top-flight secondary school. At one time he was quite active in the Rocky Mount Jaycee unit and served as chairman of its Rural Youth Day program for several years. He is a lifelong Democrat but has never sought political office.



Staff Photo by Ed Chabot

George Benedict Watson