

# **The Effects of the Tobacco Buyout on the Agriculture Curriculum, Students, and Communities in Three East Tennessee Counties**

## **Introduction**

Change...seems to be a common word lately in the United States (U.S.). Since the events of 9/11 so much in our country has changed. For example, we have higher security measures in airports, farms, etc.; technology development and usage is at an all-time high; fuel prices have sky rocketed; the use of agriculture products is becoming more diverse; and globalization is becoming increasingly needed and accepted. So what brings about change? Connor and Lake (1994) describe change as a “natural process that occurs regardless if it is interfered with or not” (p.5). The natural process of change is caused by destabilizing forces either within or outside an organization. These destabilizing forces can be caused by individuals, society, culture, or changes in a strategic plan. Whatever force or forces are implied, disequilibrium will occur and cause some disruptions among individuals, the communities in which we live, and overall our society (Dewey, 1922).

Changes that occur in society are based upon several forces. Examples of those forces are diversity, consumer demand, economic health, and globalization (Connor & Lake, 1994). Diversity in the U.S. has increased with many females, people of color, and the physically disabled taking active roles in the workplace. Consumer demand has risen to include higher quality products and more diversity of those products. In addition, improving economic health within communities has been given much attention. Communities are trying to revitalize so they can attract new, prosperous companies to their area. Furthermore, globalization has become a vital part of the U.S. economy; therefore, there is immense pressure to compete with other countries for agriculture and non-agriculture exports and imports. While all these forces cause

change, one in particular, globalization, has caused changes within states and communities in the U.S.

Connor and Lake (1994) utilized a model to assist with change. They outline four major areas: initiating, envisioning, crafting, and conducting. Initiating the change is recognizing destabilizing forces, formulating problem statements and suggesting solutions to the change. Envisioning the change refers to individuals or groups describing their current and future state and then crafting ideas to develop strategies for the future as it relates to the change. The final phase, conducting change, refers to implementing the change and then evaluating how the change has both positively and negatively effected individual stakeholders.

The provision of the *American Jobs Creation Act of 2004* stated the “orderly disposal of existing tobacco pool stocks” (Tobacco Buyout Info, 2005) has been demanded. This provision is known as the Tobacco Buyout. This change, implemented by the U.S. government, has impacted states and communities whose primary or supplemental income was obtained from tobacco production. This buyout will eliminate federal price support and supply control of tobacco (Agriculture Policy and Analysis Center, n.d.). As compensation, quota owners and active growers will be entitled to a portion of a \$9.6 billion payment over the next 10 years (Tiller, Snell, & Brown, 2002).

In the year 2000, tobacco was the single largest agriculture cash crop in Tennessee. Particularly important was burley tobacco to East Tennessee farmers. In 2003, East Tennessee accounted for 19.4 million pounds of the state’s 47.5 million pound burley tobacco production (Agriculture Policy and Analysis Center, 2002). Reports released in 2001 indicated that burley tobacco yields averaged 2,250 lbs/acre and sold for \$1.90/lb. Therefore, the total dollar production was approximately \$1,722/acre. This \$1,722/acre return on burley tobacco is

considerably larger than returns per acre of corn (\$117/acre), soybeans (\$139/acre), cotton (\$132/acre), or wheat (\$29/acre) (Agriculture Policy and Analysis Center, 2002). Many tobacco producers are now trying to determine how to compensate for the tobacco that they will no longer produce or put on the market.

The communities in the eastern region of Tennessee, in particular, are experiencing drastic changes due to the Tobacco Buyout. A community or society, as Dewey (1944) described, must be made of men who have the same “aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like –mindedness as the sociologists say.” Therefore, when an economic hardship confronts a community, like the Tobacco Buyout, not only do the community members need to make adjustments but the educational systems do as well.

As Dewey (1944) proclaimed, “we never educate directly but indirectly by means of the environment” (p.19). Therefore, because of the economic importance of tobacco to agriculture communities in East Tennessee, the teaching of tobacco production has long been incorporated into the agriculture education curriculum in the public school system. Teachers have included the production of tobacco in many class settings to appeal to students, and they have utilized the production of tobacco to develop their Supervised Agriculture Experience Programs (SAEP). In addition, students have proudly displayed the end product of their efforts at local and regional fairs (e.g. Tennessee Valley Fair).

As characteristics of the tobacco industry change, agriculture communities and agricultural education programs will most likely be expected to change. In order to assist with the changes taking place, one must first understand how local communities and educational programs have been affected by the Tobacco Buyout. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the overall impact the Tobacco Buyout has had on agricultural teachers, students, and

their families in three East Tennessee counties. In understanding the effects of the buyout, extension agents and educators of those communities can make beneficial adjustments to their programs to assist with the change and promote continued success of the agriculture community.

#### Purpose and Objectives:

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the overall impact the Tobacco Buyout has had on agricultural teachers, students, and their families in three counties. The three objectives of the study are:

1. To describe changes that have been or will be made in the high school agricultural education curriculum due to the tobacco buyout;
2. To describe the impact that the tobacco buyout has had on student involvement in SAE and FFA projects; and
3. To determine the economic impact that the tobacco buyout has had on three agricultural communities.

#### Methods and Procedures:

This study was descriptive in nature, and the researchers utilized a modified Delphi technique to generate feedback related to the tobacco buyout. Agricultural teachers from Greene, Hawkins, and Claiborne counties, in East Tennessee, were interviewed once. Each teacher was asked how the tobacco buyout has impacted their community, agricultural education curriculum, and SAE and FFA projects. The tapes were transcribed and data was used on the second-round questionnaire.

An initial questionnaire, consisting of two or three questions related to the tobacco buyout, will be developed by the researcher to generate feedback on the personal and economic impact the tobacco buyout has had on agriculture curriculum, students, and communities. The

questionnaire will be administered to agriculture teachers, students, and parents. Students under the age of 18 will be required to complete a letter of consent and have it signed by their parents.

A second questionnaire will consist of comments generated from the first questionnaire and re-administered to the same panel of agriculture teachers, students, and parents. Panel members will rank each response according to their level of agreement. A third questionnaire will contain the overall group and individual ranking to each response from the second questionnaire. The third questionnaire is primarily utilized to establish consensus among the group. Each teacher will be sent the surveys and asked to administer them to students. After completion of the surveys, the agricultural teacher will return his/her survey along with student surveys.

## Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of the Tobacco Buyout on the communities, agriculture education curriculums, and involvement of students in SAE and FFA projects and/or activities within three east Tennessee counties. The three counties studied were Greene, Hawkins, and Claiborne counties.

In response to the impact of the Tobacco Buyout on the communities within the three counties, respondents agreed to 29 changes within the community. Of these, 24 were agreed upon by a strong consensus ( $SD < 1.0$ ). As indicated in Table 1, some of the most strongly agreed upon changes were: for those who still grow tobacco, the price has changed; the tobacco farmer is at the mercy of the tobacco companies; Many people depended on tobacco money for Christmas and end of year taxes, but no longer have this money; the number of tobacco growers has decreased; the major cash crop of this area has been taken away; less tobacco is grown on small farms. Meanwhile, the changes that earned the greatest consensus included: farmers now

have to spend more time searching for a new cash crop; it is more difficult for farmers to survive on the farm; for those who still grow tobacco, the price has changed. However, there was little support in favor of the idea that it has become harder for those who still grow tobacco to find equipment.

Statement	M	SD
For those who still grow tobacco, the price has changed	4.7	0.49
The tobacco farmer is at the mercy of tobacco companies	4.7	0.59
Many people depended on tobacco money for Christmas and end of year taxes, but no longer have this money	4.5	0.64
The number of tobacco growers has decreased	4.5	0.52
The major cash crop of this area has been taken away	4.5	0.51
Less tobacco is grown on small farms	4.5	0.51
Farmers who no longer raise tobacco have become more dependant on other crops or animal production	4.4	0.51
There is less spending money available for expenses	4.3	0.80
Families have to look elsewhere for income	4.3	0.90
It is more difficult for farmers to survive on the farm	4.3	0.46
A secure source of income is lost	4.3	0.88
Small tobacco farms are no longer in the tobacco business	4.2	0.56
Tobacco farmers are going to receive less profit per acre	4.2	0.86
Farmers now have to spend more time searching for a new cash crop	4.2	0.41
Part-time tobacco producers are being put out of business	4.1	0.92
Some farmers are experiencing financial problems	4.1	0.80
Increased the number of tobacco contracts with large companies	4.1	0.88
Tobacco payoff money has been used for beef cattle and to pay of notes	4.1	0.74
Due to lower income for most farmers, the economy will be effected	4.1	0.64
A way of life is gone	4.1	0.88
The overall amount of tobacco being produced has decreased	4.1	1.03
People who help with tobacco production have lost their jobs	3.9	0.83
Hay production has increased	3.9	0.96
Small farms do not have the capital for other enterprises	3.9	0.92
Support industries of tobacco (warehouses, trucking, etc.) are out of business	3.7	1.18
There is an increase in disapproval of the government	3.7	0.59
Large tobacco farms have increased acreage	3.7	1.11
Many farms have been put out of business	3.5	1.06
Small farms are being sold	3.5	1.13
Equipment dealers are suffering because it has effected the buying power of the farmer	3.4	0.99

Farmers who are growing tobacco have increased the acreage size	3.4	1.35
Less people are in the area to help work	3.4	1.35
It has become harder for those who still raise tobacco to find equipment	2.3	1.11

Note: 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=uncertain 4=agree 5=strongly agree

Concerning change within the community, the largest disagreement revolved around the statement that there are less people in the area to work. Many respondents felt that there were people to work due to migrant labor. One respondent replied “Nobody in the area want to work in tobacco because it’s to hard labor for them, and they are lazy”. Members of the panel also expressed concern that small farms had been going out of business before the Tobacco buyout. Finally, some respondents expressed that many farmers did not increase tobacco size in the previous year, due to uncertainty of prices.

As indicated by Table 2, respondents agreed upon 12 changes within the agricultural education curriculum. Of the 12, the group reached a strong consensus in regards to 11. Those statements with the strongest agreement included: the amount of education dealing with tobacco production has decreased; students will grow crops other than tobacco; students will raise an increased number of livestock; education concerning agribusiness will increase. On the other hand, there was a strong consensus in disagreement to the statement that family farms will become non-productive. A significant number of respondents expressed a disagreement with the statement that tobacco production will be omitted from the agriculture curriculum. The respondents indicated that omitting was already in place before the Tobacco Buyout. Likewise, respondents signified that fewer students will come from an agriculture background yet not because of the Tobacco Buyout. Many respondents also stated that production agriculture will in fact still be taught but within the context of another enterprise.

Table 2: Delphi Study Round Two: Prioritized list of changes within the agricultural education curriculum as identified by a cooperating panel of teachers, students and parents		
Statement	M	SD
The amount of education dealing with tobacco production has decreased	4.3	0.62
Students will grow crops other than tobacco	4.3	0.49
Education concerning agribusiness will increase	4.1	0.70
Students will raise an increased number of livestock	4.1	0.96
The agriculture curriculum will become more diversified	4.0	0.65
Teachers will focus on the idea that FFA is not just farming anymore	3.9	0.70
Curriculum will focus on alternative occupations	3.9	0.74
The Tobacco Buyout has opened opportunities to teach and grow other crops	3.9	0.64
Teachers are teaching more diversified crop production	3.9	0.80
The number of livestock classes has increased	3.7	1.05
Agriculture will become technology driven with large corporations responsible for production of not only crops but also livestock	3.7	0.88
Teachers are teaching more diversified livestock production	3.6	0.83
Tobacco is not taught as much due to a loss in interest of production agriculture	3.4	1.06
Fewer students will come from an agriculture background	3.2	1.32
Most curriculums have already eliminated tobacco	3.2	1.15
Curriculums will focus more on farm equipment	3.1	1.03
The agricultural curriculum is based on the sciences, so the curriculum will not be affected	3.1	1.03
No Change	3.0	1.13
Curriculum will go away from production agriculture to specialty areas	3.0	0.93
Tobacco will be taught as a crop of the past	2.9	0.83
SAE programs with tobacco production will be cut	2.9	1.46
Education focuses more on production quantity as opposed to quality	2.9	1.23
Tobacco production will be omitted from agriculture curriculum	2.9	1.30
Teachers will focus on the Tobacco Buyout as opposed to tobacco production	2.9	0.99
Tobacco will not be taught in the agricultural curriculum	2.8	1.08
Agriculture education will be changed from production agriculture to service agriculture	2.7	0.98
Family farms will become nonproductive	2.1	0.83

Note: 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=uncertain 4=agree 5=strongly agree

In regards to the impact on SAE and FFA projects and/or activities, respondents replied that students who focused and SAE on tobacco, would continue to grow the crop. The respondents also indicated that a decrease in the number of crop production proficiency winners who grow tobacco had decreased prior to the Tobacco Buyout.

Statement	M	SD
Fewer students are producing tobacco	4.3	0.49
Tobacco was once a crop which was raised on every farm	4.3	1.05
There will be fewer jobs for youth in the tobacco industry	4.2	0.41
Most students who have a tobacco SAE, also have additional FFA and SAE activities. Thus, there has been very little change.	4.0	0.85
There is more focus on other agricultural money makers	4.0	0.38
FFA projects have moved away from tobacco	3.9	0.74
The focus of FFA has moved to a more general aspect of agriculture	3.9	0.59
Students have changed their SAEs away from tobacco	3.8	0.68
Some students continue in the tobacco production SAE	3.8	0.77
Students who continue to grow tobacco will most likely increase their SAEs because the size of the operations will increase	3.8	0.77
Fewer students have background in tobacco	3.7	0.88
Students have been forced to explore a wider range of projects	3.7	0.62
The number of projects dealing with tobacco has decreased	3.7	0.96
There will be a decrease in the number of crop production proficiency winners who grow tobacco	3.6	1.21
Fair exhibits at the regional and local fairs were approximately 60 to 70 percent lower than usual	3.5	0.99
SAE programs in tobacco production have declined by 50% over the last five years	3.5	0.83
Some students will not have as much money to support their SAEs	3.3	0.90
The Tobacco Buyout made it hard to base and SAE on tobacco production	3.2	1.26
Due to the fact that many farms have had to seek alternative crops, the number of SAEs will increase	3.2	0.86
Many students have no SAE and are not effected	3.1	0.99
Little change	2.5	0.64
The student enrollment has decreased	2.0	0.85

Note: 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=uncertain 4=agree 5=strongly agree

## Conclusions and Summary

This study evaluated three areas in which the Tobacco Buyout had an impact on farmers within three East Tennessee Counties. Each area revealed a different level of interest expressed by those who chose to respond. Amongst the three areas, the overlying concept seemed to be that many changes were already in place before the Tobacco Buyout. In addition, most respondents were optimistic in the idea that farmers will successfully adjust to the changes of the Tobacco Buyout.

The changes foreseen within the community seem to work hand in hand. In relation to the average tobacco farm in the three counties, many small farms will no longer grow tobacco due to prices changes and uncertainty. As result, small farms are looking elsewhere to compensate for the loss (i.e. hay production). In the meantime, tobacco production is shifting towards large farms who will sell directly to the tobacco company. These changes lead to a complete change in the way of life for many farmers. Primarily, these changes lead to a change in the economy of the area. As small farms go out of business and large farms take over the industry, small farmers are forced to experiment with alternative crops, search for alternative sources of income and deal with financial situations without the aid of tobacco money.

The agricultural education curriculum has seen some changes due to the Tobacco Buyout. However, most respondents agree that the changes were already in play before the Buyout. The panel expressed that many of the changes listed in the study were in place before the Tobacco Buyout. Teachers had already started to teach more diversified agriculture as the audiences of students were changing from students with farming backgrounds to students with little or no farming backgrounds. In conjunction with this idea, many teachers had already changed their

curriculum due to the change in state standards and a decreasing interest of tobacco production. The panel also agreed that the family farm would not become non-productive.

As for SAE and FFA projects and/or activities, while the number of students using tobacco for these projects and activities will decrease, the number of students participating will not. To the contrary, students will explore a wider range of options. For those students who continue to grow tobacco, their projects will become stronger due to the likely increase in the size of their operations. In this manner, students will benefit from the Tobacco Buyout by searching for alternative options to crop production.

#### References

- Connor, P. E. & Lake, L. K. (1994). *Managing organizational change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Dewey, J. (1944). *Democracy and Education*. New York: The Fress Press.
- University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Agriculture Policy Analysis Center. (n.d.). *Tobacco quota buyout*. Retrieved March 16, 2005 from <http://www.agpolicy.org/tobquota.html>
- University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Agriculture Policy Analysis Center. (2002, January). *Tobacco production & income in Tennessee*. Retrieved March 16, 2005 from <http://apacweb.ag.utk.edu/ppap/pp02/kings/>
- Tiller, K., Snell, W., & Brown, B. (2004). *Summary of tobacco quota buyout provisions*. Retrieved March 16, 2005 from <http://www.tobaccobuyoutinfo.com/summary.html>
- Tobacco Buyout Info (2005). *Links to most recent news and updates*. Retrieved March 16, 2005 from <http://www.tobaccobuyoutinfo.com/>