



# **Tobacco Culture: Farming Kentucky's Burley Belt (Kentucky Remembered: An Oral History Series)**

*John van Willigen, Susan C. Eastwood*

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"Whereas most crops drive farmers apart as they compete for the best prices, the price controls on tobacco bring growers together. The result is a culture unlike any other in America, one often forgotten or overlooked as federal and state governments fight over the spoils of the tobacco settlement. Tobacco Culture describes the process of raising a crop of burley from the perspective and experience of the farmers themselves. In the process of gathering information for the book, the authors performed most steps in the tobacco production process, from dropping plants, burning seedbeds, topping, and cutting to stripping and baling the finished product. Van Willigen and Eastwood document both present practices and historical developments in tobacco farming at the very moment a way of life stands poised for dramatic change. In addition to growing practices, the authors found other common threads linking growers and tobacco producing regions. Where tobacco is grown, it often becomes the major cash crop and carries the health of the economy. Farmer Oscar Richardson states, "It's bread and butter. It's the industry of the community, the state as a whole.... You take tobacco out of Kentucky and this farmland wouldn't be worth a nickel." Combining cultural anthropology and oral history, John van Willigen and Susan Eastwood have created a remarkable portrait of the heart of the burley belt in Central Kentucky.

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