

**Resiliency and Leadership of Tobacco Producers in
Greene County, TN: A Qualitative Study**

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The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of current Greene County burley tobacco producers in a declining global tobacco industry. The central research question was “How have you maintained your leadership and resilience in burley tobacco production in Greene County?” Ten Greene County producers participated in this study through an interview conducted utilizing a series of 33 questions aimed at determining specific themes regarding resiliency in their communities, as well as the individual producers’ adaptive leadership styles. Data collected from interviews were synthesized to correlate perceptions of current tobacco production in Greene County from the inception of the tobacco program to present-day regarding cultural norms and economic impact, while simultaneously providing a portrayal of tobacco as a viable cash crop and its significance to present-day global production with the direct correlation of a community’s response to overcoming significant change. It was discovered burley tobacco has historical ties to the producers in Greene County, but with the significant changes that have occurred within the industry in the last 20 years, it has become almost impossible to remain profitable. As a result, Greene County producers have utilized an adaptive leadership approach to forge new paths in agriculture enterprises, as well as becoming leaders on the forefront of a dwindling industry in Greene County, contributing to resiliency in a changing market environment.

Introduction

The tobacco industry continues to change at an ever-rapid pace with global supply and demand, world health issues, and environmental regulations steering the direction (Tiller, 2000a; Tiller, 2000b). The tobacco industry has seen several changes since the Tobacco Quota Buy-out in 2004. This industry has remained true to its heritage by continually proving to be a source of income that not only grows nest-eggs financially but grows the next generation to appreciate the hard work involved with growing a crop of burley tobacco (Yeargin & Bickers, 2015).

The passage of the AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Act) of 1938 proposed the idea that tobacco producers should earn a safety net under auction prices and provided manufacturers with a stable crop of raw material for several decades (Tindall, 1967). The AAA of 1938 designated parity as the formalized method of arriving at a fair price, thus the creation of what came to be known as the support price. The support price represented the minimum price producers would receive for a unit of their product (Schickele, 1954). It was during this time the quota system evolved and began tying tobacco producers to acreage allotments determining the maximum acreage of tobacco they could produce. The allotments were based on historical production of the farm demonstrated and reported by the producer as to where tobacco was grown on their land (Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938). Tobacco producers were then given a marketing card to facilitate the production and marketing of their tobacco crops (Schickele, 1954).

Additional significant historical factors affecting the marketing of burley tobacco were The Farm Poundage Quota Revisions Act (FPQRA) of 1990 and the advent of cross-county leasing in TN, both of which spurred economic changes in the industry. Most prominent was the allowance to sell burley quotas providing a permanent mechanism to place a larger volume of

burley quota into the hands of producers who intended to produce the quota (Snell & Chambers, 1991). As indicated by Mathis and Snell (2012), TN was facing a permanent loss of some of their quota due to low utilization, or production of quota in several high-production-cost counties. With the inception of these two critical additions to the Tobacco Program, the first stirrings of producers questioning the benefits of the quota program were born (Mathis & Snell, 2012). In addition, numerous lawsuits from both within and outside the tobacco industry continually brought pressure on the Tobacco Program during the 1990's (Mathis & Snell, 2012). Hence the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), which was an accord reached on November 23, 1998 between the state Attorneys General Office of 46 states, five United States territories, the District of Columbia, and the five largest tobacco companies in America concerning advertising, marketing and promotion of tobacco products (Master Settlement Agreement, 1998) and this was the largest civil litigation settlement in history. The primary purposes for MSA funding to the states involved Medicaid services for smoking-related illnesses and educational programs to reduce underage smoking (Master Settlement Agreement, 1998). Due to the MSA of 1998, TN has received over \$2.3 billion in payments of the total \$4.8 billion, which will be in effect until 2025 (Master Settlement Agreement, 1998) and are referred to as the Phase I Tobacco Payments.

To ease the burden of the MSA on tobacco owners and producers, the National Tobacco Growers Settlement Trust was established by Philip Morris, Brown, and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Lorillard Tobacco Company, and R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to compensate tobacco quota owners and producers for potential reductions in their tobacco production and sales (Mathis & Snell, 2012). These payments more commonly became known as the Phase II payments and totaled \$4.15 billion earmarked as payment to tobacco quota owners and producers in 14 states over the 1998-2007 period (Tiller, Feleke, & Starnes, 2010). Regarding Phase II allocations, TN received nearly \$400 million through 2010, which directly benefitted the tobacco producers and quota owners at a 90 percent/10 percent split, respectively (Tiller, Feleke, & Starnes, 2010).

Due to the passage of the MSA, which began during President Clinton's term as part of his Presidential Tobacco Commission and further spurred by a pessimistic outlook and rapidly declining quotas, tobacco state congressional members intensified their efforts to move toward a buyout in 2002 (Mathis & Snell, 2012). Finally, on October 22, 2004, the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004, otherwise known as the Tobacco Quota Buyout, was signed into law (Womach, 2004). This occurred after gaining momentum upon endorsement from Philip Morris, the leading cigarette manufacturer in the United States, which also supported Federal Drug Administration (FDA) regulation on tobacco products (Mathis & Snell, 2012). Although the FDA was not the vehicle who moved the proposed buyout into legislation, it had a great bearing on the overall outcome of the legislation. The Tobacco Quota Buyout was attached to a must-pass corporate tax bill known as the American Jobs Creation Act (Womach, 2004).

Lastly, when President Obama signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, the FDA gained authority to regulate the production and marketing of cigarettes and other tobacco products (Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, 2009). Their first major regulatory action came in 2009 with the banning of the flavored cigarettes, declaring they were a gateway for children and youth to pick up the smoking habit (Harris, 2009). As dramatic changes within the industry continue to occur, production will continue to shift from the

mountains of East TN into more feasible production/marketing locales within both the United States and globally (Tiller, 2000a; Tiller, 2000b). As a result, Greene County producers' transition from a culture alive and vibrant with tobacco as its roots and foundation to more diversified farming initiatives to remain viable in production agriculture (Yeargin, 2008a; Yeargin, 2008b). Communities within Greene County are in jeopardy of losing a way of life; a tradition, along with the threat of a tremendous economic breach being felt within the boundaries of Greene County (Yeargin & Bickers, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

“Resilience is best defined as an outcome of successful adaptation to adversity” (Reich, Zautra, & Hall, 2010). Most would consider the response to adversity to be an individual basis, determined by a crisis. However, communities are engaged daily in practices that foster resilience at the community level, and crises can differ in definition dependent upon the situation(s) (Gaventa, Smith & Wellingham, 1990). Resilience can be looked upon as a theory, encompassing both a set of capacities and strategy for promoting a readiness response to any type of crisis (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). The construct of resilience “...refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543). To expand on this concept, Ledesma (2014), described three resilience models used to describe the impact of stress on quality adaptation in the event of a crisis. Within the scope of this study, the challenge model represents the ability to enhance a community's adaptation to a stressor, enabling individuals to better prepare for the next set of challenges (Ledesma, 2014).

As described by Frankenberger, Mueller, Spangler, and Alexander (2013), for communities to develop and/or maintain resilience, they must first be prepared. This means individuals within a community who are affected by a current perceived crisis will typically seek information from the knowledge of those in the community that have managed a similar crisis before (Frankenberger, Mueller, Spangler, & Alexander, 2013). Secondly, communities must respond to the perceived crisis (Frankenberger, Mueller, Spangler, & Alexander, 2013). This is often a response from the local government acknowledging the crisis, and lastly, innovation becomes the key to success when a community is engaged in a crisis. The adaptive capacity at the community level is enabled because of a shared learning process among all those involved in the community (Berkes, 2007). As defined by Northouse (2013), “adaptive leadership is a unique kind of leadership that focuses on the dynamics of mobilizing people to address change” (p. 260). Included in the adaptive leadership model are a certain series of situational challenges that create specific leadership behaviors, thus resulting in adaptive work in which individuals emerge as leaders in their communities. Furthermore, Wong (2004) described adaptive leaders as those who learned to live with unpredictability, hence spending less time fretting about the ability to establish routines or controlling the future; rather focusing more on exploiting certain opportunities to become successful. Adaptive challenges are problems that are not easy to identify, thus often requiring a shift in perception because of dealing with a substantial change (Northouse, 2013).

Adaptive challenges are tied to emotion, therefore imparting a necessary need to change (Northouse, 2013). As a result, coping becomes an adaptive skill (Heifetz, 1994). This approach

mitigates frustration felt by the process of adaptive change (Northouse, 2013). As most individuals inherently avoid change, it is necessary for adaptive leadership to guide the process, deliberate acknowledgement for successful growth to continue, as well as to give voice to the concerns of those affected (Northouse, 2013). As a result, there is a buy-in from all affected parties resulting in a more flexible transition of change because adaptive leadership is follower-centered (Northouse, 2013).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of current Greene County burley tobacco producers in a declining global tobacco industry. The central research question was “How have you maintained your leadership and resilience in burley tobacco production in Greene County?”

Methods and Procedures

This qualitative study was grounded in phenomenology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the researchers collected in-depth interviews, which provided the opportunity for participants to develop and give their personal thought processes without fear of bias and/or influence from other respondents, especially in controversial, sensitive, or tabooed subjects (Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, & Guest, 2005). Historical records were retrieved through industry portals and current industry employees, as well as Farm Service Agency, to identify 10 prospective participants for this study, utilizing purposive sampling to identify appropriate participants (Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, & Guest, 2005). Interviews were conducted over a three-month duration with past and present Greene County growers and ranged in length from one hour and 45 minutes to almost six hours.

Ten producers ranging in age from 22 to 78 years were interviewed. Four producers were 40 and under, two were in their forties, one was in his fifties, and two were in their sixties, representing an average age of 49 years. All producers were male and were natives of Greene County.

Among the 10 producers, they have a combined 367 years' experience in working on a tobacco farm. Three producers claimed to have been actively engaged in tobacco production their entire life. Only one producer is considered new to the industry, having only been engaged in tobacco production for four years and is also of whom the youngest respondent at age 22. The remaining six range from 33 years to 45 years being actively engaged in tobacco. Interestingly, three of the remaining six became actively engaged in production at age 18 with two of those becoming active in the industry before age 12. Each participant received a code number to maintain confidentiality (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). Documents collected included personal field notes from each interview, as well as personal journal reflections upon completion of the interviews, and audio transcriptions from each interview. The reflection journal enabled further interpretation of data at any time throughout the research for this study, thus creating the opportunity to triangulate the data and maintain trustworthiness. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed, facilitating better acquaintance with the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data from interviews determined perceptions of current tobacco production in Greene County from the inception of the tobacco program to present-day. Interviews both reflect cultural norms and economic impact, while simultaneously providing a portrayal of tobacco as a viable cash crop. Interview data concluded the significance of present-day global production with the direct interaction of a community's response to overcoming significant change. Triangulation ensured validity throughout the study, maintaining credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation occurs when all respondents agree on specific outcomes throughout the study, which yields the same understanding of the outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All documents utilized throughout this study were triangulated, including the interviews themselves, personal observations, and reflections, and field notes, as well as a thick description of each participant, which are also representative of credibility.

The theme development transpired through two individuals familiar with the study: the researcher and faculty advisor. Once the transcriptions were complete, the researcher and faculty advisor individually coded the data and repeatedly revisited those codes to establish themes. The themes that were created from coding the transcripts and placing those codes into categories were impact on personal farm, sense of pride in community, resiliency, and adaptive leadership. In addition, there was more rich data to capture and seven additional subthemes were agreed upon. The subthemes identified were impact on personal farm level were diversification of their personal farming operations, production and marketing constraints, and concern for future generations. Subthemes of sense of pride in their community were communication; perceptions; heritage and historical legacy; and community involvement and community economics.

To represent dependability of this study and minimize bias during the interview process, a peer reviewer, which is a university-trained faculty member in qualitative studies, scanned for inconsistencies among participant responses, researcher notes, and observations, and served as peer reviewer by facilitating the guidance of both the analysis of data and theme development. To maintain transferability, the use of participant interview responses, the literature review, reflective notes and observations, as well as prolonged engagement in the field were utilized. All participants of this study facilitated a check of individual transcripts, establishing confirmability. Participants were not guided in their responses through the structure of probing questions and interview questions. To minimize bias during the interview process, both interview questions and probing questions were structured so participants were not guided in their responses. A university faculty member served as a peer reviewer, who is trained in qualitative studies, and facilitated the guidance of both the analysis of data, and theme development.

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

Having grown up on a burley tobacco and beef cattle family farm only fifty miles from Greene County, TN, I am highly cognizant of the potential loss in cultural traditions and how directly significant changes can alter the sense of pride and connection within communities when suffering a loss of a typical *way of life* on the farm. It is from my own personal experience, as well as personal observations during interviews with respondents of this study and later reflections upon their answers and research for this study, I recognized although change is inevitable, communities' can withstand certain change and emerge triumphant in future pursuits without losing the legacy of their historical past.

It is those direct lines with our past that drive us to succeed and enable us to impart a lasting footprint of our own in making the transition to a better tomorrow. It is the personal relationships that flourish in these communities, along with a personal sense of pride in our upbringing and current farming endeavors that allows each of us to look toward the future while never forgetting our past. It is the realization that without those generations before us, paving the way for our personal successes, perhaps the legacy they left for us to love today would be of a different status quo.

I write this as I sit in the former Austin Company's main office headquarters, which today is my office, complete with the Diamond G emblazoned on the smokestack out in front of the building that ironically houses the The University of Tennessee Extension, Greene County offices. It stands tall and proud towering over this unforgotten and distinctly memorable area of downtown Greeneville, reminding us of our cultural legacy that will forever remain in this historic district where our roots run deep with the production of a plant that epitomizes the foundation of a community rich with culture and the birthplace of the world's second largest leaf dealer today.

Burley tobacco, although a 13-month job and some of the hardest work I have ever been personally involved with, gave me opportunities far surpassing anything I could have ever imagined. Being raised on a fourth-generation burley tobacco farm, I was taught from a very early age the importance of hard work and helping my fellow neighbors. It instilled a sense of spirit in me that will forever remain because I know I am who I am today as a result of those many summers hoeing endless rows of tobacco or handing up every stick of tobacco into the barn or grading tobacco in weather so cold you could never feel your fingers or toes. Tobacco gave me not only a sense of pride for myself and my family legacy, but for my overall community. My small community in Haywood County, North Carolina is very different now than it was sixteen years ago when I left, but that spirit lives on in the little valley of Crabtree, traditionally known today as one of the best burley tobacco growing regions in Western North Carolina. There may not be a lot of the *golden leaf* seen growing on the roadsides or hanging in the barns, but we all know and remember.

Findings

Four specific themes emerged from this study, which were impact on personal farm, sense of pride in community, resiliency, and adaptive leadership. Within those themes, seven additional subthemes emerged. The subthemes of impact on personal farm level were diversification of their personal farming operations, production and marketing constraints, and concern for future generations. Subthemes of sense of pride in their community were communication; perceptions; heritage and historical legacy; and community involvement and community economics.

Impact at Personal Farm Level

The impact at the personal farm level theme focused on the 10 participants thoughts and reactions of how the tobacco buy-out had affected them and their family from a personal farm level. The subtheme areas that evolved from this are diversification of personal farming

operations, production and marketing constraints, and the concern for future generations related to tobacco production.

Diversification of personal farming operations.

All 10 producers agreed they had each diversified their farming operations because of factors within the tobacco industry. One producer (P1) performs custom spraying in his community. Two producers (P3 & P10) own lawn and/or landscape companies as a side business for the farm. Six (P1, P3, P6, P7, P8, & P9) own beef cattle; one (P7) operates a dairy farm; four (P1, P3, P6 & P8) produce hay and/or straw for resale; four (P1, P4, P5, & P8) grow corn and/or soybeans; and five (P1, P2, P5, P6, & P8) are involved in commercial fruit and vegetable operations, specifically pumpkins, blueberries, squash, and cabbage with one producing wine grapes for a local vineyard.

Upon inquiring which farm enterprises were of highest market value, two of the 10 producers (P3 & P6) claimed beef cattle. Of the remaining eight producers, five (P4, P5, P8, P9, & P10) reported tobacco was their highest value cash crop, and two (P1 & P7) reported a combination of both the beef cattle and tobacco were their highest valued crops. One producer stated, “grapes were the most profitable in my overall farming operation last year” (P2).

Production and marketing constraints.

Regarding production and market changes the producers have personally experienced in the last 10 years, three (P5, P6, & P10) reported no significant change. Of those three, one is not currently producing tobacco (P10) and one is relatively new to the industry and unfamiliar with the quota system (P5). As one producer explained, “I have only been in production for four years. I got in because of my dad. No real changes” (P6).

Five producers (P1, P6, P7, P8, & P9) stated they now operate utilizing the big bale package versus the small bale. As one producer stated, “I have gone from small bales to big bales. My acreage is up” (P1). Although one producer confirmed bigger bales was a positive change in the last 10 years, he also stated, “I simply could not afford the big bale as an option on my farm due to my small production size” (P3). As a result, the company penalized him for delivering in small bale packages.

In addition, as one producer pointed out, “Production is limited based on what pounds the company will contract to you. Therefore, I have no personal choice on how much I can grow. It is all controlled by the company because of their contract numbers” (P1). Yet another producer claimed, “The market is very unstable with uncertainty” (P2). Seven producers (P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, & P9) claim they are striving to build or maintain a high level of agronomic practices on their operations through proper usage of pesticides, resistant varieties, and decreasing costs of overall inputs to remain profitable. As one producer described, “I am more in tune with my tobacco as a crop” (P5).

All producers were familiar with the Tobacco Quota Buyout. One producer illustrated, “Initially the buyout looked good for producers, and it worked well because companies made it look attractive. It made the tobacco get in the hands of those who really wanted to produce it. During the Tobacco Quota Buyout, pounds were in the hands of those wanting to make a profit

without even growing tobacco. The disadvantage now is companies are smart enough to know the cost of production, and with no price support or government intervention companies have too much control of the marketing system. They totally control the price, who can grow tobacco, and then ultimately who can market tobacco” (P1).

However, one producer stated, “Well, the Tobacco Quota Buyout forced a lot of growers out of business. But, the tobacco is in the hands of those who want to grow it now, like myself. Price support gave us a safety umbrella because now the buyout just gave all the control to the companies. We, as producers, really have no say” (P8).

Concern for future generations.

When asked what the future holds concerning tobacco production on their farms, only five (P3, P6, P7, P8, & P9) responded they wanted to continue growing tobacco. One producer said, “I love to grow it! I need to survive” (P7). Yet another simply declared, “I’ll keep growing” (P9). One producer (P5) indicated he would decrease production, with the remaining three (P1, P2, & P4) declaring the possibility of quitting production altogether. As one producer stated, “If I can find something to replace tobacco income wise, I would. I would quit growing tobacco tomorrow, and I am very near to that point now because of the cost of producing a profitable crop. Profit margins are down, labor issues are a problem, and qualified labor is absolutely an issue. Tobacco is nowhere near appealing to grow as it once was. I only grow it today for sentimental reasons, and because I’m good at producing it because I always have. The policy problems difficulties are all too much to try to keep growing without the profit we use to receive” (P1). Yet another producer simply stated, “It does not look very good. I am thinking about quitting” (P4). One producer (P10) was unsure about his future production.

Eight of the 10 producers (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, & P9) felt tobacco was on its way out in Greene County. One grower stated, “Well, it sure is not as fun as it used to be. I will grow as long as they let me, I guess” (P8). One producer described, “This area has historically produced high-quality tobacco, and at one time we were the largest tobacco producing county in the entire state of TN. We no longer are anywhere close to being relevant on the domestic or the world-wide crop” (P1). When asked how the buyout has affected Greene County production since 2004, five producers (P1, P2, P4, P6, & P7) remarked there has been a decrease in production. One (P8) cited there were simply no producers left in the county, with one remarking, “Just drive around. It is evident. There is no tobacco left here. The small guy is out” (P8).

Regarding the influence of younger generations, nine of the 10 producers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, & P10) were adamant about the younger generation not getting involved in the industry. One producer stated, “I would struggle to encourage any young person to even consider growing tobacco these days” (P3). Six producers (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, & P8) stated even if the younger generation wanted to get into the industry and produce tobacco on their farms as a mainstay, it would be difficult. As one producer so eloquently stated, “First off, even if young people are interested in producing tobacco, their opportunity or potential of getting into the industry is very, very slim. I would struggle to encourage any young person to even consider growing tobacco these days” (P1). One producer stated, “There is no more room to play” (P4). A younger producer claimed, “Younger folks like me just can’t get in even if they want to” (P8).

Yet another younger producer illustrated, “Cattle prices are high and other crops are bringing more money to the farm cash flow” (P3). And last, “I am young. How long can I stay? It is up to the company” (P6).

Sense of Pride in Community

The sense of pride in one’s community does impact how one is perceived and how one interacts with community constituents in addition to communicating with the direct contract companies. 10 ten tobacco farmers who were interviewed discussed how communication and perceptions in the community have impacted them since the tobacco buy-out. Also, the 10 producers valued tobacco production as a heritage and historical legacy along with being involved in the community and supporting the community economic growth.

Communication.

Producers were asked if and how the direct communication from their contracting company(s) had affected their production/marketing plan since 2004. Of the 10 respondents, five (P2, P3, P5, P9, & P10) indicated they knew what was expected in advance from the company. One producer acknowledged, “I know what companies will pay up-front, what they are looking for, and how I can adjust accordingly” (P5). Yet another producer stated, “We both signed the contract before the crop year. I must deliver what I say. The company has to deliver the price” (P9).

Perceptions.

All 10 producers have all been actively engaged in tobacco production at some point throughout their lifetime. However, production has decreased at a steady pace since the Tobacco Quota Buyout in 2004. All 10 producers reported they are significantly growing less tobacco today than they were prior to and/or right after the buyout. As one producer noted, “After the buyout, I took a full-time job off the farm. As a result, my production decreased on the farm” (P5).

One producer stated, “The government should be left out of it all together” (P2). Yet another producer stated, “Well in my case I have never been more tickled to get tobacco pounds in the hands of those who really wanted to grow it. I was someone who really wanted to produce it. I do not have to spend months and months begging to get pounds now like I used to. That was crazy, but the price per pound dropped, meaning I ended up with the same amount of money, but there again I could focus on my production and my farm other than chasing down pounds” (P4).

Three producers (P4, P8, & P9) agreed the buyout forced some producers out of business, but also rid the market of those individuals wanting to get rich off tobacco without growing the labor-intensive crop as suggested by one producer, “After the Tobacco Quota Buyout, the quota owners got rich. Well, those that owned any quota. I leased a lot of pounds. The game is the same. The Tobacco Quota Buyout did weed out those guys who just did not care about growing quality. I prefer the contract system. If you grow quality, they [companies] will take care of you” (P9).

Upon asking what producers thought about the inception of the GAP program, two producers (P3 & P4) claimed it was ridiculous, declaring, “There is no rhyme or reason. No

consistency at all. They need to give us a break and realize we are business operators and tobacco producers! GAP makes no sense” (P4). Whereas, three producers (P1, P5, & P9) felt the concept is good for the producer, although maybe not efficient, as noted by one producer, “The concept is good and could be useful to the industry. I have always been supportive, although to this point it has not been effective in my opinion” (P1). One producer also noted, “It has been a good program. It raises awareness. It makes all of us as producers more competitive and efficient in the long run” (P5). One producer commented, “I am much more cautious while handing my tobacco” (P2).

Of the 10 producers, four (P3, P5, P6, & P9) hold only one contract to market their crop and four (P1, P2, P4, & P8) hold two contracts to market their tobacco, whereas, one producer (P7) admitted to holding two contracts and sometimes selling to the auction system. When inquired what their thoughts were specifically related to direct market contracts, four (P2, P3, P4, & P9) indicated a positive response, with one stating, “I wouldn’t go back to the poundage system for nothing” (P4)! Five (P1, P5, P6, P7, & P8) indicated they felt the contract system only benefitted companies, and that there was no room for the grower. As one producer indicated, “They are just too picky. Just let me sell my tobacco” (P7)! Yet another producer claimed, “This is the only way to conduct business in today’s word. My opinion” (P2).

Heritage and historical legacy.

When producers were posed the question as to what historical relevance Greene County has played or continues to play on the worldwide supply and demand stage, all 10 producers overwhelming declared that Greene County was historically the largest market in the state of TN. One of the 10 producers actually declared, “Tobacco was King” (P10)! With another agreeing, “Tobacco put us on the map” (P6)!

Community involvement and community economics.

When producers were asked if they realized the impact tobacco has played in the role of economic contributor to Greene County, the overwhelming response was verbatim, “Absolutely” from seven (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, & P10) of the ten producers. The remaining three (P5, P8, & P9) answered with, “Yes”; “Hell yes;” and “Oh, yes!” From these responses, it is clear to infer from the resounding replies all 10 producers were indeed aware of the role tobacco serves as an economic contributor to Greene County.

Resiliency in Greene County

As indicated by nine of the 10 producers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, & P9), they are currently still growing burley tobacco as a means of income for their farming operations, illustrating resiliency at the community level. Regarding market changes in Greene County, all 10 producers have continually diversified and/or produced more burley tobacco to stabilize farm income. As one producer indicated, “We [Greene County] should be able to continue to grow and deliver based on supply and demand in production worldwide” (P2), illustrating resiliency has been an active concept throughout the county for many years. In addition, as noted by one producer concerning the effect of the Tobacco Quota Buyout, “Some expanded production. Some got out of production. Some diversified” (P5). Although all but one producer feels like burley tobacco production will continue to decline in Greene County, all producers are cognizant of the

crop's influence in their hometown, indicating a community rich in resilience. As one producer remarked, "Reflecting on my childhood, tobacco was what paid the bills" (P6).

Adaptive Leadership

In referencing adaptive leadership and their influence on burley tobacco production in Greene County, eight producers (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, & P9) have adapted to the changes within the burley tobacco industry in some fashion. Of the remaining two, one producer (P10) has completely exited production. The remaining producer has been unable to adapt in the changing market environment and has thus received a lower price for his tobacco claiming, "I am too small to go to a big baling system. Therefore, I deliver in small bales and get a lower price" (P2).

Four producers (P1, P2, P5, P8, & P10) have made significant changes in their production practices to maintain profitability at the farm level. As one producer stated, "I have gone from the small bales to the big bales and added new varieties" (P1). One producer (P8) studies Crop Protection Agents (CPA's) to determine which will work more effectively and yield a lower input cost. Yet another producer proclaimed, "I have been trying to change my production program to be more in-line with that of the company, especially agronomic practices" (P5). As indicated by that same producer (P5), the GAP program has afforded the opportunity for producers to become more "in-tune" with their crop. Yet another producer remarked, "I do more record-keeping now to maintain compliance with the company" (P8), and as one producer pronounced, "We all are now more accountable" (P9).

Conclusions, Implications, and Future Recommendations

Burley tobacco has been and will continue to play an important role in Greene County, TN's economic sector, as well as maintain the historical ties framed within the context of tradition. Producers in this study identified diversification of their personal farming operations necessary to either maintain current production of burley tobacco or to maintain viable on their farms independent of tobacco. As a result, burley tobacco production represents an adaptive challenge for both burley tobacco producers and citizens within Greene County, TN, as well as the entire tobacco industry in the United States. Greene County, TN demonstrates adaptive leadership through the ability to see the big picture and its relation to both a personal farm income from the tobacco producer's standpoint. In addition, adaptive leadership is displayed through the overall economic impact at the community level while simultaneously creating an environment satisfactory to both parties.

Tobacco was profitable, and although hard work, provided a more-than-decent income for farm families throughout the county (Yeargin, 2008a; Yeargin, 2008b). How could families afford to continue to grow tobacco, but how could families afford not to? Perhaps through a process known as resilience. As this study so poignantly clarifies, there is a connection between the farmer and the tobacco plant itself which has repeatedly stood the test of time. There is a long-withstanding legacy that evokes a sense of nostalgia and pride among the communities that have historically grown tobacco. All 10 producers felt a shift in culture to a specific way of life involved with the production of burley tobacco on their family farms, spanning multiple

generations. Therefore, this study reveals a deep culture of tobacco production as a mainstay crop for community livelihoods.

Greene County entered a financial predicament with the abolishment of the Tobacco Program in 2004, which led to an emotional breakdown of farming communities throughout Greene County (Yeargin & Bickers, 2015). Greene County has seen the phenomenon of communities overcoming adversity and rising to the challenge of resilience first-hand. Although, many producers exited tobacco production during this transitional time, they either chose to diversify their farming operations to remain viable or sought a full-time job off the farm (Yeargin & Bickers, 2015). It lies within the communities to determine whether to succeed and/or fail after industry-changing events alter the current path of production. As shifts in production have occurred in burley tobacco production since 2004, so too, has the shift in mindset for Greene County citizens (Yeargin, 2008a; Yeargin, 2008b). Although no longer the tobacco giant they once were, they remain profitable in a plummeting domestic industry, staring adversity in the face, acknowledging change, and accepting the challenge to be a resilient community. They remain steadfast in their ability to withstand financial and emotional impediments through the realization of tobacco as a cultural tradition, revered and valued by those intrinsically impacted, whether directly or indirectly, through the production of burley tobacco in Greene County.

This study also concluded all 10 producers realized tobacco was a huge economic contributor to the Greene County economy. They all viewed the 2004 buyout as a negative change for the overall Greene County economy and claimed a significant exit of producers had occurred since the buyout, thus in their opinion, weakening the overall economy in Greene County. In addition, all producers in this study have demonstrated and overcome adaptive challenges, therefore making them leaders in their communities. Because adaptive challenges are tied to emotion, the need to change becomes necessary (Northouse, 2013), and thus, coping becomes an adaptive skill (Heifetz, 1994). Tobacco producers in Greene County have become key to strategizing negotiations from the farm level all the way to the legislative level, enabling all those involved with the industry a process in which clarification from all perspectives could be defined. This has resulted in a more cohesive approach to deliberate change, therefore mitigating frustration felt by the process of adaptive change (Northouse, 2013). Because many individuals inherently avoid change, it becomes necessary for adaptive leadership to guide the process for successful growth to continue as well as to give voice to the concerns of those affected (Northouse, 2013).

Burley tobacco production and marketing has significantly changed in the last 20 years, resulting in a diminished profit for both individual producers and Greene County communities as a result. However, in response to the industry's tumultuous transition, Greene County burley tobacco producers have risen to the challenge by adapting their production and/or marketing methodologies. Greene County continues to undergo momentous change, but with adaptive leaders at the helm, Greene County will continue to emerge triumphant in the face of crisis. Greene County is a resilient community born out of commitment to a legacy that has long withstood the test of time and contributed to an economy rich in agriculture and pride in their tobacco heritage. Moreover, changes have rampantly occurred in the last several years and continue to remain eminent in the burley tobacco industry, both locally and globally. As a result, both independent farms and steadfast tobacco farming communities will be in transition to

remain profitable in the ever-changing industry. Will the United States remain a player in global supply and demand when other countries can produce the “big leaf” so much cheaper? Where does the future lie with agrarian communities regarding alternative enterprises replacing the lost income from tobacco? It will be interesting to delve into the interpretations of burley tobacco producers in the future to determine advantageous outcomes benefiting local communities with diversification efforts while maintaining a unique bond with sustaining their tobacco heritage.

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