

PUBLIC MEETING OF THE USDA'S CONSULTATIVE GROUP

March 29, 2010

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am Roger Quarles a tobacco grower from Georgetown, Kentucky. I speak in my capacity as president of over 8,000 grower members of the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association from 5 states.

A portion of my comments will be from the knowledge I've gained as president of International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA). ITGA represents 85% of global tobacco production grown in 22 member countries.

While child labor is prevalent through most all agriculture sectors, I will speak only to tobacco growing.

Most tobacco and especially Burley tobacco has a history from small family farms - nowadays referred to globally as Small Stake Holder Agriculture.

When we speak of abuse of children in tobacco production it is paramount to recognize how sacred it is for farm families to work together to accomplish tasks. I'm sure we all agree parents are the first line of protection for their children with seldom ulterior motives leading to harmful activities.

Most families would consider this as learning needed life experience while aiding family subsistence.

It is therefore important to separate small vs. large stakeholders in any Agriculture sector - especially tobacco. Any abuses mentioned today will primarily be found on large estates providing enormous commercial size poundage.

The exact same task that may last 1-2 hours daily on small farms should not be considered abuse or compared to children housed on large estates with the same task extending for long hours or days.

There are easily validated reports of child labor abuse in what some would say is forced if not slavery in some instances. These are largely concentrated in Africa and some in Asia object poverty and family units destroyed by disease - particularly HIV - force children to become sometime sole provider to their surviving family members. Many countries have little industrial resources and those that do utilize children in factories for the same reasons.

Whatever the reason, the large commercial estates benefit tremendously by the low cost labor of minors. Governments simply look the other way to bring in need revenue from exported tobacco leaf.

Global leaf prices are constantly almost doubled when comparing developing countries with reported abuses opposed to countries such as the United States or Brazil that do not allow such practices.

My presence today is to also communicate how this price disparity-driven by child labor abuse - affects the economic competitiveness of our U.S. tobacco growers forced to sell our leaf against the much lower cost of the typical developing countries product that paid fractional wages, if any, beyond subsistence to these children.

United States growers have federal, state and local mandates that effectively prohibit these activities. This is enforced at risk of employer fines or jail time if children are set to any different standards than adults - indeed minors have higher standards in most states.

Great success is being recently reported in mitigating child labor abuses. The Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco-growing Foundations (ECLT Foundation) - supported by industry stakeholders including all major leaf buyers as well as the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF) and ITGA has established programs with proven positive results reducing children's presence in tobacco fields. Schools are built and utilized. Education to parents emphasizing opportunities to their children's future is succeeding. Even practical projects such a boring nearby irrigation wells that allow children to spend less time obtaining water leaves more time for school.

We believe more is possible to improve tobacco workers financial well being that would remove children from harmful workplaces. World Trade Organization (WTO) Tariffs that would equalize similar products proceed dedicated to the social pressures now permitting abuse.

Tobacco production would not cease in those countries as manufacturing will insist maintaining production diversity to safeguard ample leaf supplies.

The raw tobacco leaf ingredients are typically the least cost of consumer products with world prices for exported leaf ranging from \$2.50 to \$8.00/kilo and that depend more so on country of origin than quality. There is ample room in price equalization tariffs to help eradicate child labor abuse in tobacco.

We look forward to further progress aided by the committees' findings and resulting actions to alleviate disparities.

Thank you,