



## Employee Spotlight: Bobby Wellons, A Quintessential Expert in Tobacco Training



superior quality aspects of U.S. agricultural products.

When you want to learn about tobacco, whether it's flue-cured or burley, the industry turns to Cotton and Tobacco Program's (C&T) Agricultural Marketing Specialist Bobby Wellons. Based in C&T's Raleigh, North Carolina office, Bobby is a fixture domestically and internationally providing industry training and promoting the use of USDA grade standards for tobacco and the

Bobby began his career in 1980 with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service in what was then the Tobacco Division serving as a full-time/seasonal grader. He then transitioned to a career position based in Washington, D.C. In 1992, while maintaining his credentials as a federal inspector, one could say he was "cured" and began his responsibilities to train others on the U.S. Official Standards for all types of tobacco.

Over the years, Bobby has traveled the world and hosted classes in 14 countries (Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Malawi, Germany, Turkey, Soviet Union, Hungary, Argentina, and Canada) to train the industry on tobacco standards. Demonstration of USDA [tobacco standards](#), whether to foreign or domestic customers, provides representatives an opportunity to identify the superior attributes necessary in manufacturing quality products which tobacco companies desire. Customers place more trust in the knowledge and expertise provided by USDA, and as the tobacco industry becomes more familiar with USDA grade standards, they tend to respect U.S. tobacco and utilize it into their products.



Bobby has witnessed many changes to the tobacco industry including the passage of the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004, which eliminated the price support and quota systems for U.S.-produced tobacco; removed the regulation for monitoring pesticide residues and inspection and testing on imported tobacco; and, abolished USDA mandatory grading of tobacco eligible for production controls and the price support programs. While these legislative changes were implemented and inspection and testing moved to a voluntary service to the industry, the U.S. official grade standards regulations remained intact, as did the training Bobby provides to tobacco industry representatives. Though the decrease of services and declining demand for tobacco grading reduced staff and initiated the merger of the Tobacco Division into what is now the Cotton and Tobacco Program, Bobby has continuously provided training on this agricultural commodity, throughout his 40 plus year career with AMS.

Bobby is a 1979 graduate of the Agricultural Institute, North Carolina State University. He is originally from Princeton, North Carolina, where he currently resides. Bobby farms 66 acres in Johnston County, eastern North Carolina, presently double-cropping soybeans and wheat, but has also produced tobacco, and manages a small herd of Black Angus cattle.