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Tough questions await Clinton

Tobacco farmers find little hope in current policy

By Jefferson George
CENTRAL KENTUCKY BUREAU

CARROLLTON — Secret Service agents are preparing this small Ohio River town for President Clinton's visit Thursday, but agents probably can't head off hard questions from people who say getting tough with tobacco could ruin farmers.



CLINTON IN KENTUCKY

Clinton has repeatedly cited a need to help farmers in any national tobacco legislation. But in an area where pickup trucks bear bumper stickers claiming "Tobacco Pays My Bills," the president's pledge with tobacco to fight teen smokers and increase taxes on tobacco products has some saying attacks on manufacturers could hurt many small farmers.

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Kidwell and others have visions

CLINTON: Tough questions likely on visit to Ky.

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of a hard line on tobacco leading buyers to start dealing only with large farms for their tobacco supply, leaving behind family farms of fewer than 100 acres.

"It'll put a farmer like me out," said Stephen Carpenter, who raises about 25 acres of tobacco in Pendleton County. "I voted for him, and I'm sorry I did. (Tobacco) is the only thing I can see that he's doing wrong."

Farmers said they hear talk of support for small farms, but, with few specific measures, their fears for the future mount.

"Are we going to have a program?" asked Melvin Lyons, who raises about 60 acres of tobacco in Henry County and owns Carrollton's Kentuckiana Tobacco Warehouse, which Clinton will visit. "Is tobacco going to go on, or will it be eliminated?"

In the mix of ideas in the proposed national settlement are proposals to end tobacco's price-support program and offer farmers a buyout of their tobacco allotments, an option that some aren't ready to embrace.

"It's a bribe, that's all it is," said Don Taylor, a Franklin County farmer and part-owner of Carrollton's Brite Lite Tobacco Warehouse.

And land without tobacco just isn't as valuable, Kidwell said, explaining that he has raised grain and seen that it isn't as profitable as the golden leaf.

"You just can't make any money," he said. "The expense is too much."

Talks are set with growers and students

President Clinton will talk to growers and tobacco warehouse operators at Carroll County High School during a trip to Kentucky on Thursday.

In the past, Clinton has visited tobacco farms in Kentucky since he was in his first year in office. Clinton will give the Elmhurst Northern Kentucky International Tobacco Auction (Thursday) when drive to Carrollton, the White House confirmed yesterday.

In Carrollton, the president will meet with a group of tobacco farmers and local officials at the Kentuckiana Tobacco Warehouse.

From there, the president will go to Carroll County High School, where he will talk to students about the dangers of smoking and national efforts to reduce teen smoking.

Gov. Paul Patton will accompany Clinton at both stops.

After the school meeting, Clinton will return to Washington. The events in Kentucky will not be open to the public.

understood Clinton's concern for teen smoking but didn't understand how manufacturers of tobacco products could be held accountable. That's like faulting breweries for underage drinking, he said, and in both cases, young people will find a way to get what's forbidden.

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Kidwell has noticed tobacco farming becoming an older man's business. Fewer young men enter the profession because "the future's too uncertain."

Others endorse that observation, saying negative publicity on tobacco has taken a toll.

"We're not getting any kind of encouragement for the younger guys, even if they've been on the farm all their lives and that's what their daddies did," said Brent Lyons, Melvin Lyons' son, who also works at the family's tobacco warehouse.

As he puffed on a cigarette yesterday, the younger Lyons said he

Carrollton. About 2,000 people are expected to attend, mostly students from Carroll and nearby counties.

One of them will be Carroll County High junior Marissa Vaught, 17, who was chosen to speak with Clinton at a forum earlier in the day.

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LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

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CLINTON IN KENTUCKY

The president meets Thursday with tobacco growers and students in Carroll County. Details, Page A5.

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See CLINTON, A5

President Clinton is scheduled to visit Kentuckiana Tobacco Warehouse in Carrollton, owned by Melvin Lyons and his son, Brent.



Josh Coombs and Marissa Vaught, both 17 and students at Carroll County High School, will take part in activities stemming from President Clinton's visit.

On Page A5

■ Congressional tobacco supporter says Senate settlement bill is "on the support."

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HERALD-LEADER STAFF REPORT

President Clinton will talk to growers at a tobacco warehouse and students at Carroll County High School during a trip to Kentucky on Thursday.

In his first visit to Kentucky since the eve of his 1996 reelection, Clinton will fly to the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport early Thursday, then drive to Carrollton, the White House confirmed yesterday.

In Carrollton, the president will meet with a group of tobacco farmers and local officials at the Kentuckyanna Tobacco Warehouse.

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Editorial board

The Lexington Herald-Leader is a Knight Ridder newspaper published by the Lexington Herald-Leader Co., 100 M. Avenue, Lexington, Ky. 40508. Editorials reflect the opinion of the editorial board. Members are Timothy M. Ki Pam Luecke; Vanessa Gallman; Bill Gishop; editorial writers Larry Dale Keeling, Jamie Lucke, Audrey Lee, and cartoonist Joel Pott.

Opinions

Editorials

A future for farmers

Patton's commission, Clinton visit spotlight the needs

A few eyebrows arched at Gov. Paul Patton's absence from the University of Kentucky's dedication of the William T. Young Library on Friday. "Who's snubbing whom?" wondered those who wonder about such things.

Actually, the governor was involved in a more urgent matter that happened to conflict with the library dedication. He was talking tobacco with 600-plus Kentucky farmers and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman.

Patton made a welcome and potentially significant announcement during Glickman's visit to the Bluegrass. The governor is creating a small farms commission. Its immediate task will be to assess the implications of congressional action on the tobacco settlement. The group also will examine challenges facing Kentucky's small farms and make recommendations for ensuring they have a future.

Patton's announcement made Kentucky the first to follow the National Commission on Small Farms' recommendation that each state convene a diverse group of stakeholders to consider the future of small farms. The national commission was an outgrowth of the Clinton administration's increasing interest in the business trends that are putting America's small farms on the endangered list. The national commission made a number of recommendations that should serve as a good springboard for state-level efforts.

Kentucky certainly is an ideal place to think about the possibilities for small farms and to ponder what we lose if they disappear. With its tobacco patches, lush pastures and rich bottom land, Kentucky has survived as an alternative to the modern monocultures and confined-animal feeding operations that pass for farms elsewhere.

There's one problem: Though Kentucky agriculture is more environmentally sound than that in many other places, our farm economy is based on the stability afforded by the federal price-support program for tobacco, which also is on the endangered list.

As Rod Kuegel, president of the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association, told Glickman: "We are not here to save tobacco. We are here to save the family farm. But you can't do one without the other in Kentucky."

Gratefully, there seems to be a growing appreciation in Washington for the distinction between the cigarette companies and the small farms where the crop is grown. That appreciation is reflected in the emerging alliance between tobacco growers and health groups; in the preliminary success of Sen. Wendell Ford's LEAF Act, and in President Clinton's commitment to include farmers in any tobacco settlement.

None of this is to suggest tobacco farmers won't have to change or that rural Kentucky isn't in for a rollercoaster ride as the demand for tobacco declines.

But, finally, there are hopeful signs that leaders on state and national levels are ready to give rural Kentucky some long overdue attention. And that farmers themselves are ready to change.

Patton's small farms commission is an encouraging sign. So was Glickman's visit. So was the 24 hours that President Clinton spent last December at the White House with a delegation interested in small farms. At that meeting, Karen Annstrong-Cummings, who represented burley farmers on the National Commission on Small Farms, invited Clinton to come to Kentucky to listen to farmers. He'll be in the state Thursday.

Growers await visit by Clinton

BY PATRICK CROWLEY
The Cincinnati Enquirer

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BY KAREN MILLS
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Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Tom Bliley, R-Va., said he would begin proceedings to hold the industry in contempt of Congress if the documents are not made available to lawmakers working on a settlement.

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ident is Fort Mitchell attorney Rick Robin-
e current son, a Republican running in the 4th
o in Ken- District congressional primary, said
state the Mr. Clinton needs to have a "real
nd entire eye-to-eye exchange with people
epend on whose livelihood is at stake."

r of Lex- "I feel your pain' isn't going to
S. Senate cut it," he said.

probably Republican Jim Kidney of Fort
r. Clinton Thomas, a 4th District candidate, said
Wiseman Mr. Clinton doesn't care about policy
office. as much as politics.

o grower, "He's looking to do what suits him
Clinton in best in the polls," Mr. Kidney said.

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