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# Tobacco Stalk Production, Value and Use

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# AGRONOMY NOTES

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## TOBACCO STALK PRODUCTION, VALUE AND USE

When Kentucky farmers finish stripping the 1963 tobacco crop they will have 176,000 tons of tobacco stalks worth \$2 million on their farms.

These stalks will contain 9.8 million pounds of nitrogen, 932,000 pounds of phosphorus (2 million pounds of  $P_2O_5$ ) and 13 million pounds of potassium (15.6 million pounds of  $K_2O$ ). Equal amounts of these plant nutrients bought in commercial fertilizers in 1963 would have cost more than \$2 million.

The Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station found that tobacco stalks piled outside the barn and exposed to rainfall for 109 days during the winter months may lose 61 percent of their nitrogen, 38 percent of their phosphorus, 83 percent of their potassium and 41 percent of their organic matter. Thus tobacco stalks should be spread on the sod fields as the tobacco is stripped or should be kept dry until spread in the spring.

If tobacco stalks are spread in winter on lawns, pasture, meadow or small grain fields, the living root system will pick up most of the nutrients as they leach from the stalks. There will be even less loss of the nutrients if the stalks are spread on such fields in the spring. Loss of nutrients should be small also when stalks are spread in the spring and plowed under on land going into cultivated crops. When spread in any of the situations given above, whole stalks may interfere to some extent with tillage and harvesting operations before they rot.

Whole tobacco stalks make acceptable bedding material in loafing sheds and feed lots, especially under cattle and horses where they break up

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quite readily and can be handled in manure spreaders and are easily plowed under. They are not satisfactory in stalls that must be cleaned often.

- CAUTION:
1. Tobacco stems, a by-product of redrying plants, should be sterilized before being applied on tobacco land.
  2. If mosaic-susceptible varieties of tobacco are grown, the stalks should not be used on tobacco beds or fields.
  3. Stalks from black shank infested fields should not be used on tobacco land but may be spread on other field crops and pasture land.

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