



built on SMOKE

1700s Richmond develops as a center of tobacco inspection and trade, fueled by the labor of indentured servants, who were soon replaced by enslaved Africans.

1850s At least 17 major factories sell and ship tobacco from Richmond by rail, wagon and barge. (University of Richmond Digital Scholarship Lab)

1874 P.H. Mayo & Bros. is the first business to make cigarettes in Richmond.

1880s Philanthropist and businessman Lewis Ginter introduces a machine to mechanize cigarette rolling, which was done by hand, but he sells the technology and others capitalize on it.



TOBACCO TOWN

HOW RICHMOND'S LANDSCAPE REFLECTS INDUSTRY CHANGES

Since Richmond's early days as a center for tobacco inspection and trade along the James River, the city's economic fortunes have been entwined with those of the industry that built and sustained Colonial Virginia. Today, the warehouses and cigarette factories of Tobacco Row house apartments and offices, and cigarette smoking across the country is at an all-time low. The Medical College of Virginia, where industry-friendly researchers once collaborated with tobacco executives, became Virginia Commonwealth University, a leader in studying the impacts of e-cigarette use. Still, the one surviving cigarette manufacturer, Phillip Morris USA, and its parent company, Altria Group, continue to be major regional contributors of jobs, tax revenue and philanthropic funds. Here, we look at how the city and industry have evolved and what the future might hold.



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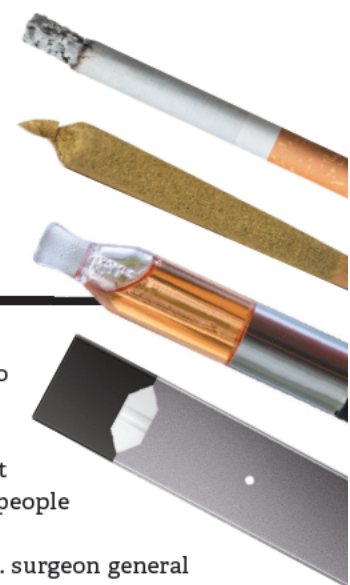
Although the number of farms is declining, some Virginia growers say tobacco is still king. Find out how they're adapting to the industry changes at richmondmag.com/tobaccofarms.

by THARON GIDDENS, SARAH KING
and GARY ROBERTSON

illustrations by IAIN DUFFUS

STRATEGIC SHIFT

As the number of U.S. cigarette smokers plummets, Altria invests in vaping and marijuana products *By Gary Robertson*



Altria Group Inc. — one of the largest producers and marketers of tobacco products in the world and a mainstay of the Richmond region's business and philanthropic community — has vaping on its mind, as well as marijuana.

Acquisitions in both product categories suggest that the legendary tobacco company is mapping a future beyond cigarettes. The change in direction broke like a firestorm during two weeks in December.

First, Altria announced its intent to acquire a 45 percent ownership interest in Canadian marijuana company Cronos for \$1.8 billion, with warrants to increase its stake to 55 percent over the next four years. Then Altria closed on the acquisition of a 35 percent stake in San Francisco-based Juul Labs, a leader in the e-vapor market, for \$12.8 billion.

In a conference call with analysts and others, Altria CEO Howard Willard articulated the company's new strategy: "The decision to pursue these investments stems from a desire to enhance Altria's long-term earnings and dividend growth, while also making progress on our harm-reduction aspiration to help adult consumers switch from combustible cigarettes to noncombustible alternatives."

Electronic cigarettes are battery-operated devices that usually contain

nicotine. They heat liquid to create a mist that the user inhales. There is evidence to back up Willard's harm-reduction comment. A 2017 study by Cancer Research UK found that people who switched to e-cigarettes had lower levels of toxic chemicals and carcinogens in their bodies than traditional cigarette smokers. Another analysis published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in January found e-cigarettes to be about twice as effective as nicotine patches or gum at helping smokers quit using combustible cigarettes.

Speaking to Altria's investment in marijuana, Willard says the cigarette giant and Cronos — a globally focused company with no U.S. operations — are looking for growth in "both recreational and medicinal" marijuana products.

What Willard didn't mention was that Altria's new business strategy comes amid a precipitous drop in the number of smokers nationwide. In November, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that cigarette smoking in the United States had reached the lowest level recorded. The CDC estimated that in 2017, 14 percent of adults smoked, representing 34 million people. Overall, the number has dropped 67 percent since the peak in 1965, when 42 percent of adults were smokers, the CDC says.

The number is also declining worldwide, but in parts of the Middle East and Africa, more people are smoking.

In 1964, the U.S. surgeon general released the first report on smoking and health, concluding that smoking causes lung cancer and laryngeal cancer in men and is a probable cause of lung cancer in women. Over the next four years, Congress passed laws requiring a health warning on cigarettes and banning cigarette ads in broadcast media.

Today, the CDC says that cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, accounting for more than 480,000

THE LEGENDARY
TOBACCO
COMPANY IS
MAPPING A
FUTURE BEYOND
CIGARETTES.

FROM TOP: GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY THE VALENTINE; GETTY IMAGES

1890 Ginter's company, **Allen & Ginter**, becomes part of the American Tobacco Co., which at one point produced 90 percent of all American cigarettes. Anti-trust regulators break the company into several components in 1913.



1916 Richmond tobacco interests generate \$6.5 million in federal tax revenues, about \$158.5 million in 2019 dollars. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)

1918 Universal Leaf Tobacco Co. is founded and generates \$1.3 million in net income. Over the century, the Richmond-based company, a global leader in leaf tobacco, also diversifies, generating a net income of about \$120.5 million in 2015.



deaths every year, or about 1 in 5 deaths.

Production numbers also tell the story of cigarettes' free fall. In 2000, Altria produced 211.9 billion units, or sticks. By 2018, the total was 109.79 billion units, a 48 percent decline. In turn, the workforce of Altria and its subsidiaries has shrunk. In 2010, the company had approximately 10,000 workers; by 2018, that number was down to 8,300.

In January, Altria announced it would lay off an additional 900 salaried workers nationwide to help pay for the company's investments in Juul and Cronos. About 430 of the employees who separated, with severance ranging from 26 to 64 weeks, were Richmond-based, according to Karen Nuckols, senior manager of communications for Altria. As of April 1, Altria had 3,750 employees in the Richmond region.

For now, combustible tobacco products continue to drive Altria's profits, with the Marlboro brand, produced by subsidiary Philip Morris USA, contributing 75 percent of total revenue for the company, according to Forbes magazine.

But that appears certain to change. Altria discontinued e-cigarette brands Green Smoke and MarkTen in December to concentrate on its purchase of Juul. In late April, Altria also received FDA approval to sell a new product called IQOS that heats tobacco without burning it.

Critics of vaping have said that Juul, and companies like it, have cultivated a following of nicotine-hungry teenagers. Rite Aid, one of the nation's largest pharmacy chains, announced in early April that it will stop selling e-cigarettes and vaping products because of concerns that they are driving tobacco use among youth.

Both Altria and Juul have pledged

to prevent underage use of their products. In November 2018, two months after federal officials called vaping by young people an epidemic, Juul announced that it would pull its flavored products from store shelves.

Cronos, meanwhile, is riding a wave powered by strong interest in medical and recreational products derived from cannabis. Canada legalized recreational marijuana in October 2018, and so far, more than 30 U.S. states also have legalized use of marijuana in some form.

A chart published by the Marijuana Business Daily magazine and website in May 2018 places the total demand for recreational cannabis in the U.S. (both black market and legal) at \$55 billion, exceeding the sales of video games and firearms. In 2017, legal recreational and medical cannabis sales totaled an esti-

mated \$5.8 billion to \$6.6 billion.

Altria's impact on economic development and philanthropy in the Richmond region and Virginia remains substantial. In 2017, for example, Altria and its companies contributed \$671 million to the state's economy through employee wages and various corporate taxes. Of that total, \$646.6 million was in the Richmond region, according to Altria.

"Since 2008, we have donated \$137 million to local nonprofits," Nuckols says, including \$14.5 million in 2018.

Kim Scheeler, president and CEO of Chamber RVA, sees Altria's investments in Juul and Cronos as a positive step.

"It's good for us as a community, too, because they are important players," Scheeler says. "I would hate to see them to sit there and not do anything and slowly wither." ■



The headquarters for Altria Group is at 6601 W. Broad St. in Henrico County.

1929 Philip Morris & Co. buys a factory in Richmond, begins manufacturing its own cigarettes.

1930s Lucky Strike becomes the nation's most popular cigarette. Richmonder R.A. Patterson had introduced the brand as chewing tobacco in 1871, inspired by the gold rush. American Tobacco Co. acquires it in 1905.



1949 The National Tobacco Festival begins its long run in Richmond. The event, which ran into the 1980s, attracts national celebrities such as Frank Sinatra in 1949 and James Arness of the TV show "Gunsmoke" in 1958.



BY THE RULES

Virginia passes a series of laws affecting the sale and use of tobacco *By Sarah King*

Gov. Ralph Northam signed into law six tobacco bills during this year's General Assembly session, including a new age requirement for the purchase of nicotine products and definitions for the purposes of levying local taxes. The laws take effect July 1. The city of Richmond, among the few localities in Virginia without a local cigarette tax, is also set to add a 50-cent-per-pack levy next month.

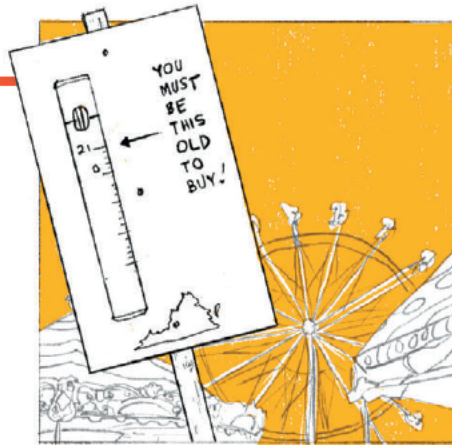
NO TOBACCO BEFORE 21

Of the new state laws, perhaps most notable is the age requirement of 21 to purchase, possess or sell tobacco or nicotine vapor products, with an exemption for active-duty military personnel.

In late January, Jennifer Hunter of Altria Client Services testified before the state Senate Courts of Justice Committee on behalf of Altria in support of a measure introduced by Republican Sen.

Tommy Norment that increases the minimum age for buying tobacco products from 18 to 21.

"New and emerging technologies like e-vapor and heat-not-burn tobacco products offer tremendous promise for reducing harm," Hunter



said. "But the FDA has made clear that this harm reduction future cannot be fully achieved without doing more to reverse underage e-vapor use rates."

While underage use of conventional tobacco products is at the lowest level in a generation, the use of e-vapor products among 12- to 17-year-olds has increased alarmingly in the past year, Hunter told the committee, citing National Youth Tobacco Survey data showing increases of e-vapor use of 80 percent among high-schoolers to

an estimated 3 million, or 1 in 5 students.

Hunter added that a minimum age of 21 will put tobacco products in line with alcoholic beverages, as well as cannabis, "which is subject to a minimum age of 21 in every state that has legalized it recreationally."

DEFINING PRODUCTS

Another successful Norment bill establishes – for the purposes of levying future local taxes – the definitions of noncombustible tobacco products, including vapor items; but it does have a caveat for the definition of "cigarette" itself to apply only to nicotine-containing products that produce smoke from combustion – possibly exempting former Altria company Philip Morris International's new "heat-not-burn" tobacco-containing device IQOS, which the FDA approved on April 30. Through a licensing agreement, Philip Morris USA will sell the product domestically. The new definitions follow a one-year study by the Joint Subcommittee to Evaluate Tax Preferences, which assessed options "for the modernization of cigarette taxes and possible reforms to the taxation of tobacco products that will provide fairness and equity for all local governments."

SMOKING PENALTIES

Localities may also begin implementing civil violations of up to \$25 for smoking in a designated nonsmoking area at a municipally owned outdoor amphitheater or concert venue, if such a penalty is passed by local ordinance. Fines are to be used "solely for public health purposes."

SMOKE-FREE SCHOOLS

School boards must amend policies prohibiting the use and distribution of tobacco products on school buses and properties to include nicotine vapor products, with written provisions for reasonable enforcement "including the enumeration of possible sanctions or disciplinary action consistent with state or federal law, and referrals to resources to help staff and students overcome tobacco addiction."

BOTTOM, FROM LEFT, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; COURTESY THE VALENTINE, RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH COLLECTION

1970 Philip Morris' Virginia Slims brand sponsors the first women-only pro tennis tournament, then a women's pro circuit in 1971 that makes **Billie Jean King** the first female athlete to earn \$100,000 in prize money in one year.



1973 Philip Morris opens a **cigarette factory** on Commerce Road. The plant encompasses six buildings, with 1.6 million square feet. It becomes the last survivor of Richmond's cigarette manufacturing facilities.



1994 American Tobacco is bought by British American Tobacco Industries of London, leading to the elimination of 350 jobs early the next year at its research and administrative facility in Chesterfield County. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)

BLOWING SMOKE

Where 'mercenary scientists' once helped to cast doubt on the dangers of smoking, researchers now lead efforts to assess the effects of e-cigarettes *By Tharon Giddens*

The link between cigarette smoking and cancer seems obvious now, but it took decades of research and advocacy to change attitudes and minds.

While researchers helped lead the way, many also played a part in supporting the tobacco industry, which funded research at major institutes and laboratories across the nation.

Sarah Milov, an assistant professor of history at the University of Virginia and author of "The Cigarette: A Political History," set for release in October by Harvard University Press, describes them as "mercenary scientists," whose work was done for the tobacco paycheck. Some of the research tobacco companies would underwrite wasn't directly linked to the business, but

helped shift attention away from it, such as projects investigating genetic links to cancer, or other causes unrelated to smoking, Milov says.

"They would write the checks even if recipients weren't trying to shill for big tobacco," she says. "It's an ingenious strategy to say the science is unsettled."

Some of the leading apologists for the industry were based in Richmond, at the old Medical College of Virginia, according to Robert Proctor, author of "Golden Holocaust: Origins of the Cigarette Catastrophe and the Case for Abolition" (2011, University of California Press). Proctor is a professor of the history of science at Stanford University.

MCV's successor, the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, is now a leader in research used to regulate tobacco through its Center for the Study of Tobacco Products. Thomas Eissenberg, a co-principal investigator, notes that the medical school now has a policy against conducting industry-funded research, and that he's seen no impact on the center's work.

"We had this unfortunate past," he says, adding that he's felt no pressure from tobacco interests.

But those past roots ran deep, as you'd expect in the capital of a state "wholly built on smoke," as England's King Charles I complained during the Colonial era.



American Tobacco's research facility and Lucky Strike plant

MEN OF MEDICINE – AND TOBACCO

The key to understanding MCV's tobacco connection is found in a trove of tobacco industry documents available through the University of California-San Francisco (at industrydocuments.ucsf.edu) and cited by Proctor. There, you'll find an American Tobacco Co. memo on the importance of biological research from 1941, stating that work done by the company and by MCV under an American Tobacco grant "provide evidence that the alleged serious effects of smoking on health are being greatly exaggerated."

American Tobacco was a lucrative benefactor. It was a leading producer of tobacco products with extensive roots in Richmond that had formed in 1890 from a merger of companies including Allen & Ginter, the Richmond-based tobacco manufacturer founded in the 1870s by John Allen and Lewis Ginter. The American Tobacco Co. South Richmond Complex Historic | **CONT'D ON P.135** >

SOME OF THE LEADING APOLOGISTS FOR THE INDUSTRY WERE BASED IN RICHMOND.

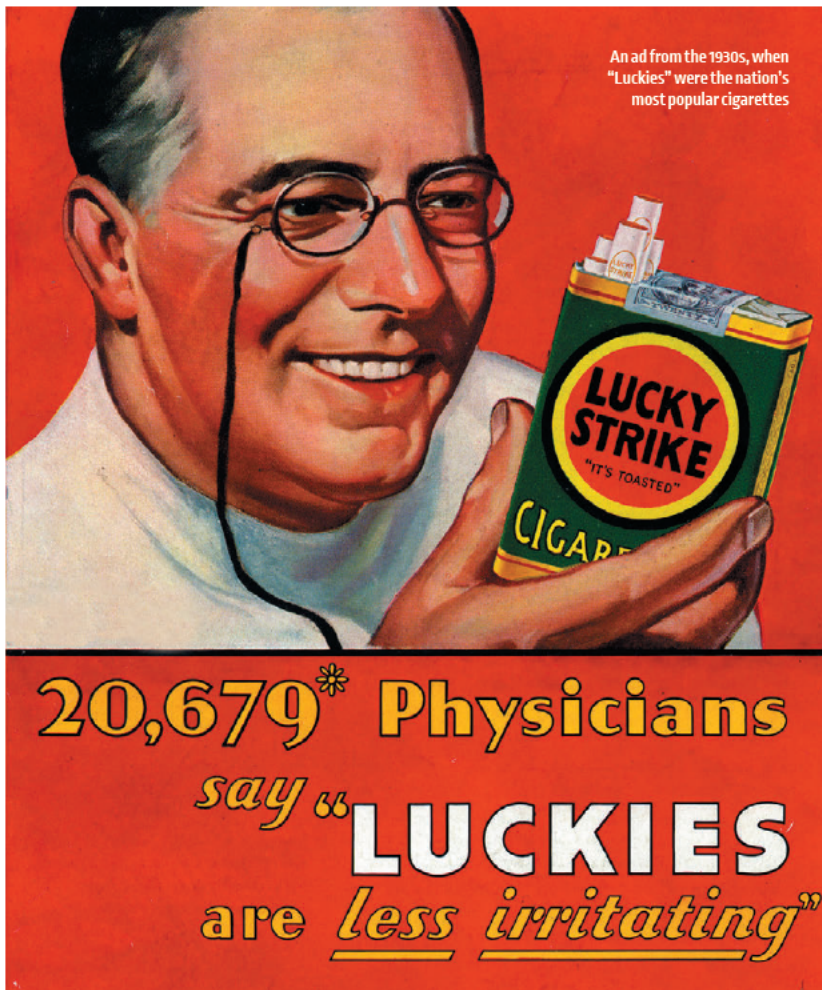
FROM TOP: COURTESY THE VALENTINE; COUTESY ALTRIA; GETTY IMAGES

2003 Philip Morris Cos. begin trading as Altria Group Inc., and the business moves its corporate headquarters from New York to Richmond.



2009 Philip Morris USA consolidates manufacturing operations in its **South Richmond facility**, which churns out 125 billion cigarettes each year. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)

2018 Altria ranks No. 154 on the Fortune 500 list, with revenues of \$19.5 billion. The company acquires a 35 percent stake in **Juul Labs**, and announces an agreement to buy a 45 percent stake in Cronos, a Canadian cannabis company.



An ad from the 1930s, when "Luckies" were the nation's most popular cigarettes

20,679* Physicians
say "LUCKIES
are less irritating"

District is off U.S. 1.

The memo expresses American Tobacco's appreciation for "the completeness with which the staff of the Medical College has been 'sold American,'" referring to the catch-phrase in a long-running advertising campaign for Lucky Strike, America's best-selling cigarette brand in the mid-20th century. "This encourages the belief that if our activities were better known, more medical men could be brought into the fold."

"It was shocking how thoroughly [MCV] was captured," Proctor says in a telephone interview.

In "Golden Holocaust," Proctor contends that tobacco, for a time, shaped research priorities at MCV, and he notes that there was a "virtually seamless" exchange of personnel between the college and American Tobacco. Some

faculty members also worked the company's labs, and American Tobacco funded certain research positions at the medical school.

One critical collaborator was Harvey B. Haag, who led the school's Department of Physiology and Pharmacology from 1936 through 1955, and was medical school dean from 1947 to 1950. He had worked with American Tobacco in 1935 to "secure evidence" that America's top cigarette brand at the time, Lucky Strike, was less irritating to the throat and lungs than other brands, according to Proctor, and had headed the medical division of American Tobacco's new laboratory in 1939.

Haag's successor as pharmacology chair,

Paul S. Larson, served from 1955 to 1972, and is noted for the international attention that he brought to the school for his nicotine pharmacology and toxicology research, according to the VCU Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology website. Asked to find a successor to lead American Tobacco's lab, Haag suggested Larson as someone with ability and a "broad-minded attitude" toward the industry.

Proctor describes Haag and Larson as faithful collaborators who testified for the industry before various regulatory groups, produced reviews of medical literature, and attended conferences, keeping tobacco interests in the know regarding cancer research.

MCV scientists also helped compile a bibliography of research on smoking and health titled "Tobacco: Experimental and Clinical Studies." It became known as "The Green Monster," and was a resource for tobacco-industry lawyers to draw upon to call into question any medical studies cited in court that sought to link tobacco use with cancer.

A change in leadership at the medical school, which merged with Richmond Professional Institute to become VCU in 1968, reflected a shift in its relationship with the tobacco industry.

Jesse Steinfeld, who had served as surgeon general during Richard Nixon's administration's first term, was tapped as medical school dean in 1976. As surgeon general, he had decried cigarette use, and warned of the hazards of smoking by women and the dangers of second-hand smoke, according to his 2014 obituary in the New York Times.

His daughter, Mary Beth Steinfeld, a 1981 MCV graduate and a professor of pediatrics at the school of medicine at the University of California-Davis, says that he was concerned about assuming duties at MCV "in

the heart of tobacco country," but that he was told by board members that the school wanted to show its independence and commitment to academic freedom, >



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< BLOWING SMOKE |

according to a VCU Health news release at the time of his death. Mary Beth Steinfeld says her father, who was dean until leaving in 1983 for a similar post with the Medical College of Georgia, had no conflicts with local tobacco concerns during his tenure in Richmond.

RESEARCH AND REGULATORS

Today, tobacco research continues at VCU, but now it's more about providing data to regulators. That's the work of the Center for the Study of Tobacco Products, which last year was the recipient of a five-year, \$19.8 million federal grant to study e-cigarettes. The study will provide data to the FDA for its use in the regulation of tobacco products and will seek to measure toxicity, user behavior and abuse liability.

The center was the first to evaluate e-cigarettes in 2010, and received \$18 million in federal grants in 2013 to develop methods to evaluate the products. The VCU center, led by Eissenberg and Alison Breland, the co-principal investigators, works in conjunction with researchers at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the University of Southern California, the University of Arkansas and at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon.

As tobacco companies push e-cigarettes as a growing business investment, one concern is the products' appeal to youth, Breland says. "More and more research is showing that young people who start with e-cigarettes then transition to combustible cigarettes."

At the center, students learn about MCV's previous efforts on behalf of the tobacco industry, using Proctor's book as a resource, Breland says. The center has also brought to campus speakers including the University of California's Phillip Gardiner, who last year discussed how menthol cigarettes are an assault on African-American health.

The work they are performing at the center is cutting edge, and has purpose, Breland and Eissenberg say.

"The feeling is that the work we are producing will lead to something," Eissenberg says, "that [it] will be part of regulations that help people." ■

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Cash Crop

For some farmers in Southside Virginia's 'Old Belt' region, tobacco is still king

by Gary Robertson
May 22, 2019 1:17 PM

RSS Print

The following is an online extra from the "Tobacco Town" feature in our June issue, heading to newsstands soon.

Garland Comer's family has been raising tobacco in Halifax County for five generations.

He expects to continue that tradition.

"There will always be tobacco grown — I'm not sure about the quantity of tobacco — and there will always be smokers," Comer says.

At age 33, he believes the future of tobacco farming lies with younger growers who will bring modern, more efficient farming methods to the fields in Southside Virginia's historic "Old Belt" tobacco region.

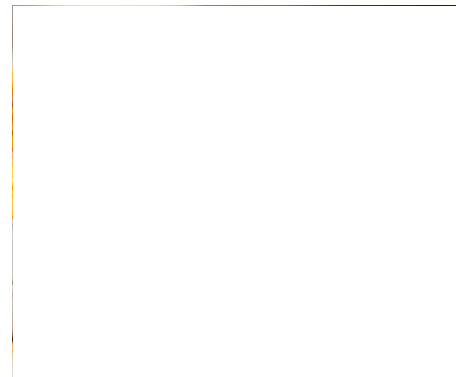
He freely acknowledges that the number of smokers in the U.S. is declining, and he anticipates the number of tobacco growers will continue to decline with it.

But he says tobacco floats on a world market — China alone has 300 million smokers, according to the World Health Organization — and the tobacco Comer grows on 280 acres is sold in multiple markets, although over the years Altria Group has been his main customer.

Besides tobacco, Comer grows 750 acres of soybeans, 200 acres of wheat and 120 acres of corn as part of a farming operation that unfolds over nearly 1,400 acres.



Halifax County farmer Garland Comer works in his newly planted tobacco field. While acknowledging a declining customer base nationally, Comer says, "There will always be smokers." (Photo by Brittany Comer)



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But tobacco is his cash crop.

"Tobacco is king. None of this would work without tobacco in this part of the country," he says.

Across Virginia, statistics from the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services indicate that the number of tobacco farms and tobacco acreage has been plunging.

In 2000, Virginia farmers harvested 25,900 acres of tobacco. By 2019, that had fallen to 17,940 acres. The number of tobacco farms has dropped even more dramatically, from 4,184 farms in 2000 to 306 in 2017.

The trend has irreversibly been toward fewer farms with more acreage.

Comer has been raising tobacco since he was 17 years old, when he took over farming operations from his grandfather, who used the money he received from the 2004 federal tobacco buyout and retired.

Nationwide, other farmers did the same, or simply used the money they received as an opportunity to add to their acreage, quit or shift to other crops or other careers. The buyout was an effort by the government to help tobacco growers transition away from raising tobacco, as market volatility increased under a free-market system.

Prior to the buyout, under a program that began in the 1930s, tobacco farmers operated under a price support system that placed quotas on how much they could grow. That, in turn, limited the amount of tobacco they could sell. By limiting supply, demand for tobacco increased and prices were more predictable.

In 2004, Congress decided to end the program, saying farmers could raise as much tobacco as they wanted. But the price stability growers had previously known — and their safety net — also ended and volatility loomed.

To help growers transition away from raising tobacco, the legislation ending the quotas also established a \$9.4 billion buyout called the Tobacco Transition Payment Program. The program stretched out over 10 years and ended in 2014. The buyout was funded by assessments on tobacco manufacturers and importers.

"It was one of the biggest changes to the industry. We refer to it as pre-buyout vs. post-buyout," says Stephen Barts, an extension agent for agriculture and natural resources in Pittsylvania County.

Barts' family also has been growing tobacco for about five generations, and his brother is still in the business.

Altogether, Barts says Pittsylvania County had about 6,000 acres of tobacco under cultivation in 2018.

That made it the largest tobacco-growing county by acreage in Virginia, according to data compiled by National Agricultural Statistics Service's Virginia Field Office.

"For us in this part of the world, tobacco is by far the most high-valued crop on a per-acre basis that we can grow," Barts says.

David Reed, an extension agronomist for tobacco in Blackstone, paints a bleak picture for Virginia's tobacco farmers this year.

“The tobacco industry is and has been on a steady decline for many years and tobacco farmers in Virginia will especially feel this for the 2019 season. We have a number of growers who did not get marketing contracts, so they will not be growing this year and our overall acreage will be reduced, as well as the prices paid for the tobacco by some purchasers,” Reed says.

The driving force behind the current decline, he says via email, is that worldwide tobacco producers have caught up with the quality of American-grown tobacco, and have made it available to manufacturers at a lower cost.

The trade war with China also has had a chilling effect on the demand for U.S. tobacco, Reed says.

According to the World Health Organization, fewer people are smoking overall, but tobacco use is increasing in parts of Africa and the Middle East. The WHO estimated that there were 1.1 billion smokers worldwide in 2015, a decrease of 29 million since 2000. About 80 percent of the smokers lived in low- and middle-income countries, according to the report.

Despite the cloudy outlook, Garland Comer remains philosophical about the years ahead.

“There’s always been uncertainty with tobacco,” he says. “I mean since the first leaf was grown and shipped back to England, I’ve always heard that there’s been uncertainty in tobacco.

“It’s all in what you want to put your neck out on the line for,” Comer says.



For farmers such as Garland Comer, tobacco is their highest-value crop per acre. (Photo by Brittany Comer)

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by Gary Robertson
May 22, 2019 1:17 PM

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