

10. TOBACCO

In our thorough literature search we did not find a single record of a waterbird species using agricultural land planted to tobacco (*Nicotiana spp.*). Occasional use of tobacco fields, by common species such as Killdeer or Red-winged Blackbird, quite possibly occurs, but there is no evidence that such use has significant conservation value. In the U.S., tobacco is primarily grown in the southeastern states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (Figure 10-1), a region of North America that coincides with the wintering ranges, migratory pathways, and breeding grounds of a number of waterbirds. However, the resources and crop production methods of tobacco fields likely render them of virtually no value to waterbirds. Tobacco is sown in late winter and harvested in late summer and fall, in between which there are periods in which plants are transplanted, ‘suckered’ (jointing stems removed), and the flowering stalk topped off. Each of these activities is designed to encourage maximum production of the leaves used in the manufacture of tobacco products.

Unlike some other major row crops, no waste seed or other food resources to speak of are available to waterbirds after the tobacco harvest. Moreover, the alkaloid nicotine naturally present in tobacco renders the leaves noxious to grazing wildlife and acts as a biological deterrent to many terrestrial invertebrates. Along with a heavy use of pesticides to control other nicotine-resistant insect pests and weed plants, these features mean that tobacco fields are likely devoid of any value to waterbirds during all times of the year.

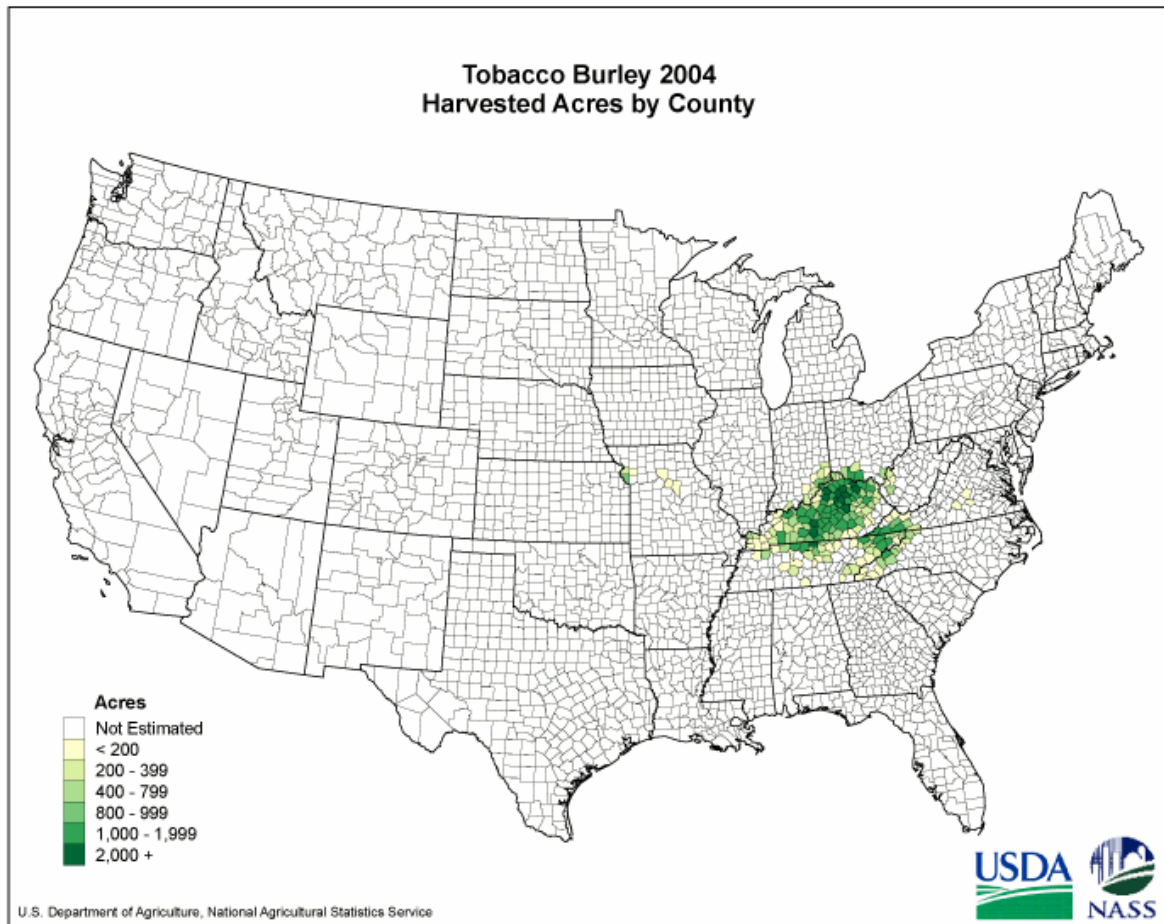


Figure 10-1. Map of the distribution of tobacco planted in the United States during 2004, the most recent year for which data are available. From the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (<http://www.usda.gov/nass/aggraphs/cropmap.htm>; accessed 2 Jan 2007).