



The ITGA 2024 Annual Global Meeting in Raleigh, US focuses on trends in tobacco yields

The International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA) 2024 Annual General Meeting (AGM) attracted the widest global tobacco sector representation in the birthplace of flue-cured “bright leaf” – Raleigh, North Carolina. Hosted by the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina (TGANC), the meeting included a dynamic program concentrating on the practical side of tobacco farming in the US.

ITGA’s in-depth research on tobacco yields during the year served as the basis for discussion during the four-day AGM. This research followed yield progression in the last decade across the world and featured analysis from leading agronomy experts. The US, Brazil and European markets have registered the highest yields, but the overall picture is one of flat performance or even decline, which goes against trends in other crops like corn, soybean and cotton. In the US, where commercial growers have achieved the highest results, changes in management practices have not led to the expected increases. Elsewhere, in Africa, aspects inherent to small scale growers including lack of infrastructure, water deficits, inadequate land preparations have led to much lower productivity.

During the Open Session Conference, delegates had the opportunity to discuss this research in the US context. A panel consisting of local growers, moderated by Dr William Snell from the University of Kentucky, that combined many generations worth of tobacco growing experience, highlighted that the issues faced by growers across the world a very similar. Panellists discussed in length the consequences of the of the so-called US Tobacco Buyout Program which led to concentration of bigger farms and shift of production to the west of the country but failed to deliver yield improvements. Despite the consistent hardships, the President of TGANC Matt Grissom summarised the general thought of the panel: *“We grow and will continue to grow tobacco because we love to do it.”*

This was followed by a panel of leaf merchants moderated by TGANC Executive Vice President Graham Boyd who discussed the current marketing season dynamics. The shortage of leaf was a key topic that attracted interaction with the audience. While some believed that FCV tobacco market will balance in 2025 and burley in 2026, others are convinced in a longer time frames. *“The US has a strong educational base in tobacco. The importance of universities such as the NCSU in this regard is invaluable. This puts the country in a unique position.”*

Shane MacGuill, Euromonitor International Global Lead Nicotine and Cannabis, presented the latest global consumption trends. MacGuill notated that *“the US market is emblematic of an ongoing realignment of consumption behaviour in the context of overall flat nicotine volume evolution. Among the key drivers for the future of consumption will be broadening of the nicotine universe, regulatory innovation, including sustainability and cost of living concerns.”*



Ivan Genov, ITGA Manager Tobacco Industry Analysis, went through the driving forces in main tobacco growing countries in 2024: *“Unfavourable weather patterns in leading markets including Brazil, Zimbabwe and the US were a key contributor to decreased total global sales in 2024”*. A few markets registered growth, with Malawi, a key country for burley, having a particularly positive year.

The US regulatory perspective was presented by Benjamin Dessart, Universal Leaf Vice President of External Affairs. Dessart explained the recent US tobacco regulation policy shift and relevant proposed rules: *“These matter to growers because certain propositions could impact the entire supply chain.”*

The global regulatory discussion was driven by Michiel Reerink, Alliance One International, International Corporate Affairs Director and Managing Director. Reerink touched on several international treaties and their relevance for growers. Regarding the European Union Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, Reerink noted: *“Compliance starts in 2027 depending on the company size and revenue. This requires companies to exercise due diligence in their own business and value chains, prevent human rights violations and minimize certain environmental risks.”*

During the Closed Session Day of the AGM, ITGA’s President José Javier Aranda was re-elected for another term. His tireless efforts to advance the interests of growers around the world have consolidated a strong support in the farming community.

Furthermore, Mercedes Vázquez, ITGA CEO, highlighted a key strength of ITGA: *“Information is the key strategic factor allowing growers to improve their business operations. ITGA’s 40 years of information sharing have built an enormous bank of expertise. ITGA is the only global growers’ body that provides a worldwide representativeness and unmatched capabilities in the sector.”*

ITGA’s 2024 AGM was fulfilled with a wide range of interactive activities. The group of delegates that included representatives from Argentina, Brazil, the European Union, India, Malawi, the Philippines, Tanzania, the US, Zambia and Zimbabwe, visited one of the biggest tobacco processing plants in the world, witnessed a live auction, took an insightful tour in a research farm and visited the North Carolina State Fair – a state that still has pride in tobacco.

Editor's note:

Follow our designated AGM webpage: <https://www.itgaevents.com/> and Social Media handles [@TobaccoGrowers](#) on X and [itga-tobaccoleaf](#) on LinkedIn for more details about the event

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