Flue-Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization
Statement to the World Health Organization
Concerning the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

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Scope of Activities: Stabilization is the US tobacco producers' marketing cooperative which administers price support for US flue-cured tobacco producers.

Interest in the FCTC: We recognize the changing environment of international tobacco trade and need to be included in the dialogue as it relates to our economic interests.

Source of Funding: Capital reserves retained from tobacco producer member dividends.

Tobacco producers in the United States are very cognizant of the changes that are taking place with respect to the production and manufacture of tobacco products not just in the United States but globally as well. Thousands of U.S. producers, their families, and their communities have been economically impacted by these changes. The Master Settlement Agreement between the major tobacco companies and the States Attorneys General, continued cuts in production, and an environment of uncertainty about the future both in the U.S. and abroad have made it difficult for tobacco producers to determine how they are to make a living in the coming years--- how they are to feed and clothe and educate their families when their means of earning a living have been reduced by almost half. While there has been some relief provided through the Master Settlement Agreement and some governmental assistance, it has been only over the last year and a half that we have begun to seriously discuss and talk about long-term solutions. These solutions will take time to develop and implement. Change does not come easy for many who have worked hard all their lives to produce tobacco to sustain their families and communities. New ideas and new sources of revenue will have to be developed. Reeducation and training will be needed. Extensive collaboration will be needed between numerous entities in the private and public sectors working together to realign and restructure the system in which tobacco is produced, manufactured, sold, and marketed----a system that meets both the growers' needs as well as public health objectives. We state these facts and concerns only to caution the World Health Organization, that while an international tobacco control treaty may have benefits to the world population as a whole, it will not be achieved without serious economic impact on some of the most important production regions in the world. In implementing the treaty, steps must be taken to consider and offer viable solutions and remedies to the world’s agricultural communities that produce tobacco.
As we stated above, we recognize the fact that the international business of tobacco is changing and that these changes will have significant impact on our lives as producers. We know that many of our counterparts around the world refuse to acknowledge the serious health consequences of tobacco abuse and wish that the WHO’s initiative would simply go away. In the US we are realizing that rather than attempting to preserve the "status quo" to continue to deny that tobacco use is a major and serious public health problem, we need to be a part of the solution to the problems and challenges we all face. We believe that legitimate tobacco producing interests can interject meaningful and constructive ideas into the discussion. And we as growers want to be a part of the discussion. The implementation of the Treaty will, according to the WHO’s own timetable, take a number of years. Now, then, is the time for legitimate grower interests to start thinking about how the agricultural tobacco-producing regions of the world will need to change. This is a unique opportunity that should not be allowed to pass.

In considering the impact that an international treaty will have on agricultural economies, the World Health Organization should consider the unique experience of tobacco producers and health advocates in the United States as an example. In the U.S., something quite remarkable has occurred; tobacco producers and the public health community have been openly and honestly dialoguing regarding the future of tobacco production and consumption. While we have not agreed on all issues, the results of this open dialogue have proved to be very positive. It has led to a greater understanding of the issues important to both groups. For the parties involved in this process it has been difficult at times. Decades of mistrust and misunderstandings have had to be overcome. Both tobacco producers and health advocates have had to move forward while bearing fierce criticism from their associates. But let me assure you that these dialogues and the cooperation will continue to move forward because without them both producers and public health will undoubtedly suffer.

U.S. health advocates have learned that tobacco producers are ordinary people who are interested in providing for their families and communities, rather than destroying the health of the world’s youth. They have gained an appreciation for the complex economics of agriculture and the fact that agricultural alternatives to tobacco production are easily suggested, but more difficult to achieve. Most importantly, in promoting their goal of reduced tobacco consumption, U.S. public health advocates have offered compassion and a willingness to understand the needs of thousands of farm families who face economic disruption. U.S. tobacco producers have learned that, in spite of the rhetoric, the majority of health advocates are pragmatists. We have learned that most health advocates realize that tobacco consumption will continue throughout the world for decades to come. And we have come to realize that we can and should do something constructive about the serious health consequences from the use of tobacco products, without banning the production or manufacture of tobacco and tobacco products.

A statement of mutual understanding known as the **Core Principles Statement Between the Public Health Community and The Tobacco Producers Community** was signed and released in March of 1998 and represents the culmination of many hours of open and honest dialogue. More than 60 agricultural and health groups signed the statement representing the interests of millions of people throughout not only the tobacco producing states but the entire United States as well. Some of the areas of agreement include:
• There should be strong complementary federal, state, and local laws which guarantee that tobacco products are not marketed, advertised, or otherwise made available to anyone under the age of 18;

• There should be fair and equitable regulatory controls over the manufacture, sale, distribution, labeling (including country of origin), and marketing of tobacco products (FDA). Such regulatory controls should have as their goal the protection of public health and the assurance that users of tobacco products are provided with full and complete information about the products they are using;

• There should be a tobacco production control program which is designed to protect producers and stabilize the farm economy;

• There should be standards (domestic and international) relating to the use of agricultural chemicals and other quality, health, and safety controls for the production of tobacco;

• There should be moneys made available (including allocation of moneys from current excise taxes or settlement funds) to tobacco producing states and communities to develop options and opportunities that ensure their future economic and social viability into the future.

We hope that what we have accomplished in the U.S. can serve as a productive model at the international level, where it is clear much work needs to be done.

Earlier we indicated that finding viable alternatives to tobacco production have been slow in coming, and that success would depend on changing the thinking of entire communities as well as policy makers. It will require new ideas and new resources. There is no one solution that will solve the dilemma that tobacco producers find themselves in. New options and opportunities are now being talked about, even though it will take some years for these to be implemented. Some will succeed, some will undoubtedly fail. But now is the time to start talking about these options and opportunities on a regional, national and international level. In the U.S. there are serious discussions as well as specific actions being taken about:

• How the agricultural sectors of the tobacco producing states should be realigned to meet the declining production of tobacco. What kinds of assistance will be needed to make this happen?

• What are viable alternatives for tobacco producers and what are the resources and policy changes that will be needed for change e.g. (alternative crops, livestock, timber, industrial hemp, investment tax credits, governmental funding and assistance)?

• What are other alternative uses for tobacco, such as transgenic tobacco that may produce new medicines and enzymes that could have positive benefits to society?

• How can the tobacco program be restructured in a way that provides long term stability for tobacco producers and their communities and takes into consideration issues related to public health?
• How can tobacco producers be educated and retrained to produce tobacco products that may be lower in risk and are not treated with pesticides and other chemicals?

These are just some of the issues that tobacco producers, public health advocates, and governmental bodies must work on cooperatively if we are to find meaningful solutions.

In summation, the world of producing and marketing tobacco and tobacco products is changing. These changes will impact the way hundreds of thousand of farm families make their living. As tobacco producers we acknowledge the changing environment and believe that in the coming years, if we begin to act now, we can find solutions that protect both producers as well as public health. We want to be a part of the international dialogue as it moves forward just as we have become a part of the dialogue in the U.S. We ask the member nations of the WHO to receive us, not as opponents or obstacles to change, but as active participants in finding winning solutions to complex problems.