

## RECOGNITION

**On their day, tobacco growers celebrate their achievements**

*More than 1,100 people come to event at Oktoberfest Park yesterday, in Santa Cruz do Sul*

by EDEMAR ETGES

**To support the work carried out by tobacco growers and highlight the social and economic importance of tobacco production, those were the objectives of the first statewide celebration yesterday of Tobacco Growers Day.**

The idea to establish this date came out of the meeting of the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA), which took place in Argentina in October of 2012. In Brazil, the bill was 'embraced' by Federations of Agriculture and Rural Workers in Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul (Faep, Faesc, Farsul, Fetaep, Fetaesc and Fetag) and Brazilian Tobacco Growers Association (Afubra).

The celebration initiated with the bill introduced by State representative Heitor Schuch, of the PSB Party, who spoke of the efforts by the State Legislature to defend the production chain. He stressed that of the 55 representatives, only five currently fight in defense of the production chain. In addition to Schuch, the following are also engaged: Adolfo Brito (PP), Edson Brum (PMDB), Marcelo Moraes (PTB) and Pedro Pereira (PP). Schuch pointed out that their fight in defense of tobacco growers have earned him the nickname "Death's Representative" given by anti-smoking groups.

"But this does not disturb me, as I know that many other drugs, like crack, kill a lot more people than cigarettes," he explained. He also emphasized that tobacco growers lead a hard life, in addition to being considered by many as criminals. "We will not give up defending growers, because 180 thousand small grower families depend on tobacco for their livelihood."

**Tobacco growers are diversified family-owned producers**

The president of Afubra, Benício Werner, said tobacco growers invest in diversification and do not depend solely on tobacco. "You are our only certainty in our moments of uncertainty," he insisted. Speaking on behalf of Farsul, congressman Luiz Carlos Heinze (PP/RS) commented on the difficulties faced by tobacco growers in their dedication to this crop, among them the requirements imposed by the Ministry of Labor. "Our job is to defend you in Congress," he said.

Defending tobacco growers is a fight in which Fetag has always been engaged. Its president Elton Weber challenged anyone to show proof that any other crops are as profitable as tobacco. "Tobacco growers must be valued, regardless of their crops," he stressed. Iro Schünke, president of the Interstate Tobacco Industry Employers Union (SindiTabaco), insisted that tobacco producers deserve our praise and recognition. He reminded all that he himself started as a tobacco grower, and is very proud of that. "To be here speaking to you is to go back to my own roots. You must be proud of the fact that you are tobacco growers," he noted.

The Mayor of Santa Cruz, Telmo Kirst (PP), spoke about the creation of the Association of Tobacco Growing Municipalities, adding that the mayors of these municipalities are going to be meeting in November, in Blumenau, Santa Catarina, to formally create the association. "The mayors are proud to defend an integrated system for tobacco growing," he pointed out.

/captions:/

*More than 1,100 people came to the event in Santa Cruz.*

*State representatives and congressmen were honored.*

*"I will not stop fighting at the State Legislature, as long as there is one single tobacco grower."  
Heitor Schuch, State Representative*

## **Crop ensures income and quality of life for tobacco growers**

During the first statewide celebration of Tobacco Growers Day yesterday in Santa Cruz do Sul, eleven rural families shed light on what tobacco represents in terms of their livelihood, achievements and quality of life improvements. Two of the eleven families come from [*the town of*] Venâncio Aires.

José Afonso Rippel, a resident of Linha Hansel, with wife Ilária, daughter Cleusa and son-in-law Márcio Müller by his side, informed he was born and raised in the tobacco growing environment. He told of when he started with his parents and how he continued after marriage, and how much the family had accomplished with the income that the crop allowed. For the 2013/14 harvest, he has planted more than 600 thousand tobacco stalks in partnership with six other sharecroppers.

Residents of Ponte Queimada, the couple Léo and Marlene Frey recalled the difficulties before planting tobacco. Léo said he faced some hurdles in his first few years of investing in tobacco, but it was worth the effort: in a few years he managed to pay all his debts and also build a new home, purchased a better car, and made improvements to his farm. For this harvest, he planted 35 thousand stalks in 4.5 hectares of his own land, and said his tobacco is the source of livelihood for 8 different individuals.

Accompanied by family members, José Lauro Kist, a resident of Linha Armando, in the interior of Santa Cruz do Sul, at the boundary line with Vila Arlindo, said he comes from a family that has always been involved with tobacco. With the income provided by the crop, he expanded area and production in partnership with his son-in-law Laércio Baierle. For the coming harvest, they have planted 115,000 stalks of tobacco, in addition to producing all the basic subsistence foods. "All we have achieved yet is due to tobacco," he said.

/captions:/

RIPPEL: "Tobacco is the livelihood of my family and these six other families."

FREY: "If they take tobacco away from the small farms, family-based growers will not survive."

KIST: "All we ask is to be allowed to grow tobacco; it's what we know how to grow, and it's what we do best."

