

# Ready for All Eyes to See — **ULT'S** AGRONOMIC CENTER

## STAFF REPORT



**BRAZIL IS FAST BECOMING** an international model of success in the field of tobacco production. With this in mind, Universal Leaf Tabacos (ULT) has developed a new Agronomic Center in Rio Pardo, Brazil, that offers the international tobacco community the unique opportunity of seeing and learning how tobacco is produced in this part of South America.

The municipality of Rio Pardo is 16 km south of Santa Cruz do Sul, along the BR 471 Road, and ULT's new Agronomic Center (AC) stands out there in the midst of an 85-

**Inside of ULT's Plant Breeding Green House (March 2004) — different sizes of haploid and double-haploid plants, grown for new tobacco variety development.**

hectare farm that boasts fertile soils and a lush, rolling landscape. There is even a small lake that, along with providing irrigation, offers up some good fishing for visitors. Good fishing aside, ULT initially established the AC to be the seed production center for all contracted farmers throughout Brazil, with the additional aim of increasing Brazilian seed exports to foreign markets. At the same time, the AC was also to function as ULT's research station for tobacco variety



An ariel view of ULT's Experimental Station, taken January 2002. At that time the planted garden trees still appeared very small. The alternated green strips indicate ULT's soil rotation methods with tobacco, green cover crops and small grains. These methods help prevent diseases and protect and conserve the soil.

development and production, with a goal of continually increase the quality of the tobacco. And now, after a year of being in operation, the AC has taken on an additional duty: the training of field and processing personnel.

In 2004, ULT arranged to have its entire staff trained according to a specific set of guidelines that cover everything from Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to production, curing, grading, leaf buying, and processing. More recently, ULT offered this opportunity to its affiliates and customers in the form of an intensive three-week training course, covering each step in the process from seedbed to curing. So far, 24 technicians have been trained at the center on three different occasions, and response from the course has been very positive, so much so that ULT will continue to offer the program on an ongoing basis (*see below for more details*).

The AC's permanent staff consists of 19 people, including administrative personnel and technicians. Normally, some 15 temporary employees and students work there, too. Five additional technicians work from the tobacco growing regions. Pollination and seed harvest work are done manually and require some 250 seasonal workers.

The AC is run by two managers, agronomists Horst Deeke and Sérgio Willani. The former supervises the whole operation and is mostly dedicated to seed production and the variety development program. His qualified staff includes a Ph.D. Geneticist and an M.S. Plant Breeder. Willani is the operational research manager, in charge of the training program and agronomic field research. He also supports the production team and prepares technical folders. 🌿



The view from the north side of ULT's main Training, Administrative and Laboratories building at the Experimental Station.



### THE MAIN ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AT UNIVERSAL LEAF TABACOS' NEW AGRONOMIC CENTER

- **SEED PRODUCTION:** The 230,000 tons of tobacco processed by ULT in Brazil come primarily from seed produced at the AC. State-of-the-art equipment and the latest technology are required to reduce the level of nicotine converter plants, resulting in varieties that develop less TSNA's. The amount of seed produced by the center for the 2004 crop came to 1,390 kilos, of which, 575 kilos were hand-pollinated hybrids.

- **VARIETY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:** ULT boasts modern variety development research work. Its haploid tobacco research and the corresponding laboratories are the most advanced in Brazil. The focus of the research is always on quality, yield, and disease resistance. Since the late 1980s, variety development has been a serious concern, and it was in 1995 that the program really accelerated. Since then, the center has launched 26 new flue-cured and burley cultivars, all of them showing great resistance to tobacco mosaic virus, PVY, nematodes and bacterial wilt. Of note are the burley hybrids resistant to bacterial wilt. Of course, every year new challenges arise, calling for new plant breeding and variety selection projects.

- **TRAINING PROGRAM:** ULT's training program could be described as on-the-job training. It consists of visits to ULT's different growing areas in Southern Brazil, along with a thorough immersion in the company's processing operation. Each step of the program is accompanied by printed material containing relevant technical information. Young technicians and newly hired trainees all have the opportunity to go through the program — and, as mentioned above, the program is now being offered to overseas operational people and customers.

