

Lessons from a Boot and the Previous Generation

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That's a strange title for my fall column isn't it? I think so too. In most of my columns I jump right into the points I'd like to make relative to peanut production (Although someone once told me, "I enjoy reading your columns but when I get to the end I'm not sure what you were trying to tell me.") This column may bring this sentiment on steroids. I'll get to a point about peanuts towards the end so I hope you'll hang in there.

A month or so ago we had our first in-person, peanut agent in-service training session in the field. The last time we got together, other than by zoom was in January 2020. It was really good to actually see people in the field and talk about life and peanuts. In the process I noticed that quite a few of the agents were wearing the *EXTRATUF® Ankle Deck Boot*. This style of footwear seems to be on the rise. And it's not only agents (some in their twenties.) My dad has a pair (and he is moving into his mid-80s.) I think I'll get a pair of these, but I'll need to wear out my current pair of leather shoes (the ones I got in 2016.) But the *EXTRATUF® Ankle Deck Boot* worn by agents reminded me of a pair of these I created over a decade ago. I had an old pair of knee boots (that were created from a pair of waders) I used for hunting. Eventually, the upper portion sprung a leak (most likely caused by a sharp reed on a deer path) and I removed that section and converted it to what we now know of as the *XTRATUF® Ankle Deck Boot*. I could quickly slide my feet in and out of these boots but they didn't protect me from seed ticks or red bugs. Ultimately, something finally penetrated the bottom of one of the boots making sure a dew in the morning would get my foot wet.

I gave these boots a name long before the *XTRATUF® Ankle Deck Boot* came our way, and eventually wrote in the name with a Sharpie on those boots for fun – *Tharlton Boot™*. Apparently I should have turned in a patent and started a business. My dad shared a story about Mr. Tharlton Lawrence and his boots (I'd already heard the story about my dad begging Tharlton, who worked with my granddad Henry, to let him "drive" the mule while drains were made in peanut fields in the early 1950s.) Tharlton Lawrence was one of the key figures in my dad's and granddad's life on a farm in the lower end of Chowan County. I'm not sure if you have ever read the book *An Hour Before Sunrise* by Jimmy Carter, but I suspect my granddad and Tharlton (who farmed together) and the next generation raised by these two men along with Splint and Mildred (Popeye, Diddle, Calhoon, and Weasel) probably had similar experiences. I can remember meeting Tharlton only once. And I only remember being around my granddad Henry (who I called Dee Deet) just a few times. But stories about folks from that period of time grow in importance to me each day, in ways one just can't imagine as a youngster.

The *Tharlton Boot™* got me thinking about the foundation established by the previous generation for many of us to build on. The "table" was set for me. I just had to work hard and steady (and not even hard all of the time) to have a reasonable chance at success in our society. I am thankful for many people "setting the table" for me (and cleaning off

the surface when needed) along the way. But many others in our society have not had the same “table” set for them. I need to remember that – it’s been much harder for some of the others in our society to succeed no matter how hard they work. And along with that realization, I have a responsibility to recognize the challenges people face and reach out in meaningful ways to help.

Helping the next generation build on the foundation of the previous generation is a key, and farmers know this – there is a deep desire for the farm to be as good or better for the next generation. And too, there are many examples of when the current generation needs some outside help so they can pass along a fruitful foundation to their next generation. These are messages I take from my *Tharlton Boots™* and will be reminded of in the *EXTRATUF® Ankle Deck Boot* when I see them around. Bob Sutter comes to mind when I think of visionary people who build a foundation for the next generation. Thank you a million times over Bob!

So how does all of this culminate into a message about peanuts? At this time of the year, I think of disease control and how our fungicide programs protect peanuts from leaf spot. As we move toward the end of the season, we hope the fungicide programs we put in place in early July will keep peanut plants healthy. We also know that what we did earlier in the season can only go so far - we need to stay the course through September. And depending on weather patterns, perhaps even into early October. One of our big questions is whether or not the fall of 2021 will be like 2018 (warm well into October) or 2020 (cool in late September and October.) Keeping our peanuts healthy gives us the greatest flexibility in digging and allows us to let peanuts reach optimum maturity. When plants are healthy they can stay in the field longer with less pod shed.

We certainly can’t control weather patterns in the fall but we can control the effectiveness, timeliness and duration of our fungicide sprays. The *Tharlton Boots™* I own had a long life before their second and third comings. Maybe the first life (a set of waders) and then the second life (a boot that protects up to the knee) represent our fungicide programs in July and August. But even after these lives the manifestation in the form of the *Tharlton Boot™* has a lot to offer. The parallel is an effective fungicide program through September. Protection provided by those last sprays can bring the peanut crop across the finish line in great shape. This serves two purposes. We have the best chance at having a high-yielding peanut crop on the first hand. And as we think long-term, we maintain sustainability of our fungicides through effective resistance management. I could go on more about the part of the boot we know as the *Tharlton Boot™*. Interestingly, it’s the part of the boot that was in place at the beginning (a pair of waders) that traveled a long road as a knee boot and finally made it to the form of an “old school” *EXTRATUF® Ankle Deck Boot*. Transitions through these phases were challenging, and in the process my feet got wet. But I couldn’t argue for a second about the effectiveness and longevity of this pair of boots when I was willing to adjust along the way (I think my grandparents would be proud of my decisions to get the most out of those boots.) The last phase, the *Tharlton Boot™* was present even when other parts of

the boot wore out. Those boots as a whole allowed me to enjoy duck hunting (as waders) and deer hunting (as knee boots.) I wasn't very good at either but the boots helped me get to the right place. Maybe that's like some of our newer and more effective fungicides. They have enabled us to enjoy higher yields but they carry risk of evolved resistance in our pathogens. But then again, I will always know what the foundation of the boot is. Sounds a lot like chlorothalonil and its role from start to finish in our fungicide programs, especially as a resistance management tool at the end of the season.

