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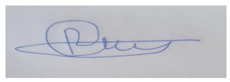
C.PEYARA		**20…/…06/ 2025…..**
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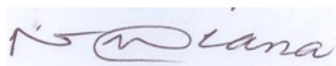
MR D. NDUMIYANA		**28…./08 / 2025**
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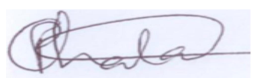
P CHAKA		**21/…08/.2025……**
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Abstract

The Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) represents a transformative approach to tobacco curing for farmers in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. This study addresses the inefficiencies of traditional curing methods such as inconsistent product quality, high labor costs, and significant environmental impact by introducing an IoT-based automated system. The ATCS leverages advanced sensors, control algorithms, and real time monitoring to regulate temperature, humidity, and ventilation within curing barns. Key objectives included achieving 95% Grade A tobacco, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 95%, and implementing a fault detection system with rapid alert mechanisms. Quantitative results demonstrated the ATCS maintained temperature within ±1.5°C and humidity within ±4% of set parameters, surpassing stability targets. The system produced 94% Grade A tobacco, a marked improvement over traditional methods (65%), and reduced emissions by 90.5%. Fault detection occurred within an average of 3.4 seconds, ensuring minimal operational disruptions. Qualitative feedback from farmers highlighted enhanced leaf quality, reduced labor, and improved working conditions. This research underscores the ATCS's potential to revolutionize tobacco curing by enhancing efficiency, sustainability, and profitability. Recommendations include refining humidity control, integrating hybrid energy solutions, and expanding farmer training programs to facilitate widespread adoption. The study contributes to the broader field of precision agriculture, offering a scalable model for resource-constrained settings.

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Chapter 1:

<u>Executive Summary</u>

This study outlines the development and implementation of an Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) designed to revolutionize the traditional tobacco curing process for Zimbabwean farmers in Mashonaland Central. By leveraging advanced technologies such as IoT, the ATCS aims to enhance efficiency, improve product quality, and reduce environmental impact (Dankan Gowda et al., 2021). This aligns with growing trends in precision agriculture, where technology is used to optimize resource use and improve yields (Wolfert et al., 2017)

The ATCS will automate critical curing parameters, including temperature, humidity, and ventilation, ensuring optimal conditions for curing tobacco leaves. This automation will lead to significant labor reduction, energy savings, and consistent product quality (Zhang et al., 2022). Research has shown that automated environmental control in agricultural processes can lead to significant reductions in energy consumption and improved consistency in product quality (Zhang et al., 2022)). Additionally, the system will collect real-time data on curing processes, enabling data-driven insights and optimization, which is crucial for continuous improvement and maximizing efficiency (Linaza et al., 2021)

1.1 Introduction

This project aims to develop and implement an Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) to revolutionize the tobacco curing process for Zimbabwean tobacco farmers. By leveraging advanced technologies such as IoT, the ATCS will automate critical curing parameters, ensuring optimal conditions for curing tobacco leaves. This automation will lead to significant labor reduction, energy savings, and consistent product quality. Additionally, the system will collect real time data on curing processes, enabling data driven insights and optimization. The ATCS will ultimately contribute to a more efficient, sustainable, and profitable tobacco industry.

1.2 Background Study

The traditional tobacco curing process is a labor intensive and time consuming operation that relies heavily on human intervention. This manual approach can lead to inconsistencies in product quality, energy inefficiency, and negative environmental impact. To address these challenges, the adoption of automated systems has emerged as a promising solution. Automated tobacco curing systems offer precise control over critical parameters such as temperature, humidity, and ventilation, leading to improved product quality, reduced labor costs, and enhanced energy efficiency.

1.3 Problem Statement

The traditional tobacco curing process is a labor intensive, time consuming, and environmentally harmful process that relies heavily on manual labor and is susceptible to inconsistencies in product quality. This manual approach often results in:

- **Inconsistent Product Quality:** Variations in temperature, humidity, and ventilation can lead to inconsistent curing outcomes, affecting the final product's taste, aroma, and overall quality.
- **Inefficient Resource Utilization**: Manual control of curing parameters can lead to energy wastage and inefficient use of resources.
- **Environmental Impact:** Traditional curing methods can contribute to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions due to the burning of fuel for heating and ventilation.
- **Labor Intensive and Costly:** The labor-intensive nature of the process increases labor costs and can be physically demanding for workers.
- To address these challenges, an automated tobacco curing system is proposed to optimize the curing process, improve product quality, reduce labor costs, and minimize environmental impact.
- By implementing the ATCS, we aim to significantly improve the tobacco curing process for Zimbabwean farmers in Mashonaland Central, leading to higher quality products, reduced costs, and a more sustainable industry.

1.4 Project Objectives

- To design and implement a system to automate the control of temperature, humidity and ventilation with curing barns.
- To achieve a minimum of 95% of cured tobacco bales graded as "Grade A" or higher, with a reduction of at least 20% in the standard deviation of moisture content across batches.
- To reduce direct greenhouse gas emissions from the tobacco curing process by at least 95% contributing to an overall reduction of at least 10% in the total greenhouse gas emissions associated with the curing process.
- To implement an automated fault detection system that identifies and alerts users to equipment failures (e.g., heater malfunction, sensor errors, or fan stoppage) within few seconds of occurrence

1.5 Research Questions

- To what extent does the implementation of an Automated Curing System(ATCS) minimize energy consumption compared to traditional flue-curing methods over a standard curing cycle?
- What is the best configuration of sensor networks and control algorithms within the Automated Tobacco Curing System to achieve the best and stable curing environment?
- What are the key hindrances preventing tobacco farmers from adopting automated curing systems?
- What factors would motivate tobacco farmers to integrate automated curing systems into their operations?
- How effective are different alerting mechanisms (e.g., mobile push notifications, SMS, alarms) in prompting timely user response to faults?
- What types of equipment failures (e.g., fan stoppage, heater failure, sensor malfunction) are most common in curing barns, and how can they be detected using real-time data?

1.6 Research Propositions/hypothesis Objective and RQs are enough

- The Automated Tobacco Curing System will reduce the average workers hours needed per curing cycle by at least 25% as compared to manual curing processes.
- The automated system, utilizing best sensor networks and control algorithms, will keep temperature and humidity within +/- 3% of the set parameters throughout the curing process.
- Real-time monitoring of tobacco leaf temperature and humidity by the Automated Tobacco Curing System will demonstrate a very strong positive correlation ($r > 0.75$) with the final grade and market value of cured leaves.
- The Automated Tobacco Curing System, powered by energy-efficient control strategies, will decrease greenhouse gas emissions associated with tobacco curing by at least 70% compared to traditional practices fuel-based systems.
- Tobacco growers with access to system training and technical support will demonstrate a higher rate of successful Automated Tobacco Curing System adoption and implementation compared to those without such support.

1.7 Justification of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons, addressing critical challenges within the tobacco industry and contributing to broader societal and environmental goals:

- **Improving Leaf Quality and Consistency:** The Automated Tobacco Curing System's precise control over curing parameters will lead to a more uniform and higher-quality leaf, meeting the demands of the discerning global tobacco market . This consistency enhances the reputation of Zimbabwean tobacco growers and improves customer satisfaction.
- **Enhancing Economic Sustainability for Tobacco Growers:** The Automated Tobacco Curing System aims to decrease day-to-day operational costs through energy efficiency and labor reduction, thereby increasing profitability and ensuring the long-term economic viability of tobacco farming practices.

- **Advancing Technology in Agriculture:** This research demonstrates the application of cutting-edge technologies like IoT in the agriculture sector (Dankan Gowda et al., 2021) It contributes to the expanding field of precision agriculture, showcasing how data analytics and automation can revolutionize traditional agricultural practices. The ATCS can serve as a model for other agricultural processes, empowering the adoption of innovative solutions to improve sustainability and efficiency.
- **Improving Working Conditions and Addressing Labor Challenges:** Traditional tobacco curing can pose significant health and safety risks to workers due to exposure to high temperatures and smoke (Fotedar & Fotedar, 2017). The Automated Tobacco Curing System will reduce the demand for manual labor, mitigating potential health hazards and improving working conditions for farmers. This can also help address labor shortages within the tobacco industry.
- **Contribution to the Zimbabwean Economy:** Tobacco growers are major contributors to the Zimbabwean economy. Improvements in tobacco leaf quality and the efficiency of the tobacco curing process will enhance the value of Zimbabwean tobacco products on the international market. The widespread adoption of the Automated Curing System has the potential to significantly boost the nation's competitiveness in the global tobacco industry.

1.8 Assumptions

- **Sensor Reliability and Accuracy:** It is assumed that the type of sensors used in the ATCS will provide reliable and accurate real-time data on humidity, temperature, and other relevant parameters throughout the leaf curing process. This assumption is supported by advancements in sensor technology, which have shown significant improvements in accuracy and stability in agricultural applications (Gebbers & Adamchuk, 2010)
- **Controller Stability:** It is assumed that the software and control algorithms will function stably and reliably, maintaining the desired curing parameters without significant failures or errors. Software aspects have to be robust. Research on embedded systems and control algorithms highlights the importance of rigorous testing and validation to ensure stability in real-world applications (Jaber, 2017)
- **Power Supply Consistency:** It is assumed that there will be a reliable and consistent power supply to the Automated Tobacco Curing System throughout the curing process. In rural

agricultural settings, power supply stability can be a concern. Therefore, this assumption acknowledges the importance of robust power solutions or backup systems(Fu et al., 2021).

- **Farmer Cooperation and Acceptance:** It is assumed that tobacco growers will be receptive to adopting the new curing technology and will cooperate in its implementation and testing. Studies on technology adoption in agriculture suggest that farmer acceptance is influenced by factors such as perceived benefits, ease of use, and compatibility with existing practices (Raptis et al. (2022).

1.9 Limitations

- The study will be limited also by the tobacco farming season whereby the researcher will not be able to find the tobacco leaves to use and demonstrate rather the researcher will end in create conditions only not used.
- The study will be limited by variability in sensors used and type of actuators used and heaters
- The study will not include tobacco board validation of the results, which can limit the applicability of the findings.
- Ensuring that the IoT generalize well to new, unseen data will be challenging and will require techniques such as cross-validation and regularization.

1.10 Definition of Terms:

- Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS): A machine that automatically dries tobacco leaves in a barn.
- Flue-Cured Tobacco: Tobacco dried by hot air, which turns it yellow or orange.
- Curing Cycle: The entire process of drying the tobacco leaves.
- Control Algorithms: Rules the machine follows to keep the air in proper condition.\
- Artificial Intelligence (AI): Machines that can think and learn like human beings.
- Machine Learning: Making machines learn from data.
- Quasi-Experimental Design: Comparison of groups when it is not feasible to choose persons for entry in every group.

Conclusion

This study introduces an Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) designed to revolutionize tobacco drying for Zimbabwean farmers by replacing labor-intensive manual methods with automated temperature, humidity and airflow control. The system aims to achieve three key benefits: producing 95% Grade A tobacco quality, reducing harmful emissions by 95% through cleaner energy use, and significantly lowering labor costs for farmers. The research examines both barriers to adoption (such as initial costs and training requirements) and potential motivators (including increased profits and simplified workflows). While facing practical challenges like seasonal leaf unavailability for testing, the ATCS promises substantial improvements in product consistency, operational efficiency and environmental sustainability. Subsequent phases will focus on system design and real-world testing, with the potential to enhance Zimbabwe's global tobacco competitiveness through smarter, greener agricultural technology.

Chapter 2:
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines existing research and technological advancements in tobacco curing systems globally, with a focused analysis on African and Zimbabwean contexts. The purpose of this review is to explore traditional, current automated and semi-automated curing systems, highlighting their design strengths, operational efficiencies, and limitations. Evaluate unresolved challenges (e.g., energy inefficiency, scalability, user accessibility) in existing solutions to position our Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) as a targeted improvement. To assess environmental and economic impacts of prevailing methods, emphasizing the need for greener, cost-effective alternatives in resource constrained settings like Zimbabwe (W. et al., 2017).

Development of a Low Cost and Energy Efficient Tobacco Curing Barn in Zimbabwe (2024)

Overview of the System

The paper discusses the development of the Kutsaga Counter-Current 1 (KCC 1) barn, a significant local Zimbabwean initiative aimed at improving the efficiency and sustainability of tobacco curing in the country (Moyo et al., 2025). Traditional wood-fueled barns in Zimbabwe often require up to 14 kg of wood to cure a kilogram of tobacco, leading to substantial deforestation and environmental impact. The KCC 1 barn introduces a counter-current airflow design that significantly enhances heat exchange, reducing wood consumption to a more sustainable 3.5 kg per kilogram of cured tobacco. This makes it a commendable, more environmentally conscious option for small-scale Zimbabwean farmers who traditionally rely on wood fuel. While a vital step forward in fuel efficiency and sustainability by minimizing wood reliance, the KCC 1 barn, like many contemporary designs, still relies on manual operation and on-site management, and continues to produce emissions from combustion. This contrasts with the growing need among Zimbabwean farmers for remote control and automated batch processing, ideally powered by cleaner energy sources like electricity, to optimize their time and labor across diverse farming activities while further reducing their environmental footprint.

Strengths

- **Energy Efficiency:** The KCC 1 barn's counter-current design allows for more effective heat exchange and significantly reduced wood fuel consumption, directly addressing the critical issue of deforestation and high operational costs associated with traditional tobacco curing methods in Zimbabwe (W. et al., 2017).
- **Increased Capacity:** With a capacity of 1.5 hectares, the KCC 1 barn accommodates larger quantities of tobacco, making it a viable solution for the expanding production needs of small-scale farmers in Zimbabwe.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** The barn's construction utilizes readily available locally sourced materials, making it relatively low-cost to build while still maintaining impressive curing efficiency, thus making it accessible for local farmers.
- **Quality of Cured Tobacco:** The design does not compromise the quality of the cured tobacco, yielding a grade index comparable to traditional methods, which is crucial for maintaining market value for Zimbabwean tobacco.

Weaknesses

- **Complexity of Implementation:** While the KCC 1 barn is energy efficient, its construction may require specific technical knowledge and skilled labor, which could present a barrier for some farmers accustomed to simpler, traditional barn designs in Zimbabwe.
- **Initial Investment:** Despite being cost-effective in the long run due to reduced fuel consumption, the initial setup costs for constructing the KCC 1 barn may still pose a challenge for small-scale growers with limited financial resources in Zimbabwe.
- **Maintenance Requirements:** The specialized brick construction and intricate design of the KCC 1 barn may lead to higher maintenance needs compared to simpler, less efficient traditional barn designs, requiring ongoing attention from farmers.

- **Combustion Emissions:** Despite reducing wood consumption, the KCC 1 barn still relies on wood combustion, which inherently produces greenhouse gases and particulate matter, contributing to air pollution and environmental impact.

Gaps

- **Limited Automation & Remote Control:** While improving fuel efficiency, the KCC 1 barn lacks the integration of advanced IoT technologies for real-time remote monitoring and automated control of temperature, humidity, and airflow (Tripathi et al., 2019), which would further optimize the curing process and reduce the need for constant on-site human intervention.
- **Absence of Batch Setting:** The ability to pre-set and manage an entire curing cycle's conditions (batch conditions) in advance, allowing farmers to initiate and largely oversee the process remotely, is a significant gap in systems like the KCC 1, which primarily focus on structural and fuel efficiency improvements.
- **Advanced Materials for Further Efficiency:** Exploring the use of modern heat-retaining materials or enhanced insulation could further augment the energy efficiency, even beyond the impressive wood reduction achieved by the KCC 1 design (W. et al., 2017)
- **Cleaner Energy Integration:** While wood consumption is reduced, there's a need to explore fully clean energy sources like electricity, potentially coupled with solar power, to eliminate combustion emissions entirely.
- **Enhanced User Training Programs for Automation:** While user training is essential for the KCC 1 (*Government Pension Fund Thailand Environmental, Social, and Governance Weight and Score*, 2020)), there's a broader need for programs that cover the operation and maintenance of fully automated and remotely controlled systems to improve adoption rates for next-generation technologies.
- **Scalability Options with Remote Management:** Developing modular designs that can be easily expanded or adapted to different farm sizes, coupled with remote management capabilities, could increase accessibility for more growers across Zimbabwe.

Improvements of Introducing an Automated Tobacco Curing System to KCC 1 barn.

The proposed Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) represents a significant advancement that builds upon the commendable achievements of the KCC 1 barn, particularly for Zimbabwean tobacco farmers. While the KCC 1 makes great strides in wood fuel efficiency and local construction, the ATCS focuses on revolutionizing operational control through automation and remote management, while critically embracing a cleaner and more controllable energy source.

- **Enhanced Operational Efficiency & Remote Batch Control:** The ATCS brings full automation and real-time data analytics, streamlining the curing process *beyond* just fuel efficiency. By enabling farmers to pre-set entire curing conditions for a batch in advance via an Android APK, it significantly reduces the need for constant on-site monitoring and manual adjustments. This allows farmers to manage their time more effectively across diverse agricultural tasks, ensuring optimal curing conditions without continuous physical presence.
- **Cleaner Energy & Minimized Emissions:** A pivotal improvement of the ATCS is its primary use of efficient electric heaters. This is highly relevant for Zimbabwean tobacco curing as it completely eliminates emissions of gases (like CO_2) and particulate matter associated with wood combustion, leading to a much cleaner and more environmentally responsible curing process. Electric heating also offers superior precision and consistency in temperature control, directly contributing to high-quality flue-cured tobacco (Choudhary, M. K., & Pandey, A. (2020)).
- **Data-Driven Decisions with Off-Site Access:** By leveraging extensive data from integrated IoT devices, farmers can make informed decisions about curing conditions, optimizing quality and yield, all accessible and actionable from their mobile devices, regardless of their location (Wolfert et al., 2017).
- **Reduced Labor Costs through Comprehensive Automation:** An automated system diminishes the need for manual monitoring and adjustments, particularly by providing remote oversight and control, thereby freeing up labor for other critical farming activities that were previously tied to fuel management and on-site barn supervision.

- **Superior Sustainability:** By transitioning from wood to cleaner electric heating and potentially integrating renewable energy sources (like solar power, as highlighted by Evans & Florschuetz, 2016), the ATCS offers a more complete sustainability solution, further mitigating environmental impacts while ensuring energy efficiency.
- **User-Friendly Remote Interface for Wider Adoption:** The ATCS, with its intuitive Android APK, is designed to enhance user experience, making complex automation accessible and manageable for all Zimbabwean farmers, thereby improving adoption rates compared to systems requiring specialized on-site technical knowledge (García, L., Sánchez, J. S., & García, F. (2020)).

In conclusion, while the Kutsaga Counter-Current 1 barn represents a vital and cost-effective improvement in tobacco curing efficiency and sustainability within Zimbabwe by optimizing wood fuel, the integration of advanced automated IoT technologies in the ATCS, coupled with its remote control, Android APK, and batch setting capabilities, and crucial transition to cleaner, emission-minimizing electric heating, offers the next revolutionary leap (W. et al., 2017). It enhances productivity, environmental stewardship, and farmer convenience, paving the way for a truly modern and efficient tobacco farming industry in Zimbabwe.

Design and Temperature Modelling Simulation of the Full Closed Hot Air Circulation Tobacco Bulk Curing Barn

In 2022, advancements in tobacco curing technology led to the development of a Closed Hot Air Circulation Tobacco Bulk Curing Barn, signifying a global shift from traditional natural ventilation methods to more sophisticated forced ventilation systems (Zong et al., 2022). This modern approach integrates automatic control mechanisms and a hot air circulation system, designed to reduce energy costs and minimize manual labour requirements. While these systems offer a degree of automation, their inherent design often still necessitates on-site monitoring and manual adjustments as the curing cycle progresses, which can be a limiting factor for tobacco farmers in Zimbabwe who often manage multiple agricultural activities.

The integration of forced ventilation technology has prompted extensive research into structural designs and airflow dynamics within tobacco curing barns (Wang et al., 2023). Studies have focused on various configurations, emphasizing that the distribution of airflow, temperature, and humidity is crucial for achieving high-quality cured tobacco. While the implementation of hot air circulation allows for increased tobacco leaf loading and reduced on-site labour demands for *physical tasks*, the operational control still largely relies on a continuous presence or periodic checks, which can be inefficient for farmers seeking to optimize their time across various chores.

The introduction of a fully enclosed hot air circulation system aims to address the limitations of open humidity drainage, enhancing energy utilization and improving the quality of cured tobacco leaves. A temperature control model based on energy conservation principles was developed, employing a PID (Proportional-Integral-Derivative) control strategy optimized by the Sobol sequence seeker algorithm to simulate the system's performance in a compact curing environment (Li et al., 2024). While such a system automates individual parameter adjustments, it typically lacks the advanced capabilities for farmers to remotely set and manage entire curing profiles or batches from a distance, or to receive critical alerts without physical presence.

Key Innovations

1. **Novel Design:** The dense baking room with a fully closed hot air circulation system aims to enhance energy efficiency and improve tobacco leaf quality through controlled air circulation.
2. **Temperature Control Model:** Developed based on energy conservation principles, this model facilitates better regulation of curing conditions within the barn.
3. **Advanced Control Strategy:** Utilization of a PID control system, enhanced by Sobol optimization, is designed to improve the responsiveness and precision of temperature control within the barn.

Operational Mechanism

During the curing process, hot air generated by a heating system is circulated within the baking room, facilitating heat and humidity exchange. This process raises humidity while lowering the air temperature. The humidified air is then processed through dehumidification equipment before being reheated, creating a continuous cycle of air circulation. The system's components include heating chambers, circulation fans, temperature and humidity sensors, and control units, all designed for automated operation. However, the level of direct farmer interaction required for setting or adjusting these parameters throughout a curing cycle can still be substantial.

Findings

1. The new barn design effectively mitigates issues associated with open humidity drainage, conserves residual heat, and enhances energy efficiency, preserving tobacco leaf quality.
2. Establishing a dynamic temperature control model has improved the stability and responsiveness of the curing barn, particularly in environments with high inertia and time variability.
3. The optimized PID control system demonstrates significant improvements in overshoot and adjustment time, ensuring more precise control over the curing process within the barn.

Gaps

1. **Limited Remote Operability:** Despite internal automation, these systems often lack comprehensive remote control capabilities, requiring farmers to be physically present at the barn to monitor progress or make crucial adjustments to temperature and humidity settings (Dankan Gowda et al., 2021)
2. **Absence of Batch Control Features:** The ability to pre-set and manage an entire curing cycle's conditions (batch conditions) in advance, allowing farmers to initiate and largely oversee the process remotely, is typically missing, leading to increased demands on farmer's time.
3. **Real-time Data Integration for Remote Action:** While some systems use sensors, their integration for dynamic, real-time adjustments *from a distance* and sending proactive alerts that demand immediate off-site attention remains a significant gap (Tripathi et al., 2019).

4. **Energy Optimization Strategies:** Continued exploration of energy recovery systems and alternative energy sources, such as solar and biomass, to minimize consumption (Evans & Florschuetz, 2016) remains a critical area for development.
5. **User Training Programs:** Developing user-friendly training initiatives to improve operational understanding and practices among users (*Government Pension Fund Thailand Environmental, Social, and Governance Weight and Score*, 2020) is crucial for any new technology.
6. **Modular Design:** Designing systems that can be easily scaled or adapted to various barn sizes and configurations is an ongoing challenge.
7. **Environmental Impact Assessments:** Conducting comprehensive studies to evaluate the environmental impact of the curing process and promoting sustainable practices to reduce carbon footprints is vital.

Improvements that Automated Tobacco Curing System has over Closed Hot Air Circulation Tobacco Bulk Curing Barn

The next-generation Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) represents a significant technological leap forward from traditional closed hot air circulation designs. While existing systems offer internal automation and utilize components like temperature and humidity sensors, and even electric heaters, the ATCS focuses on incorporating cutting-edge innovations that fundamentally transform the *management and flexibility* of the curing process. Unlike conventional systems that may still rely on significant manual oversight and on-site presence, this intelligent automated solution brings unprecedented remote precision, efficiency, and batch setting capabilities to tobacco curing operations, empowering farmers to manage their operations more effectively and allocate time to other crucial tasks.

Smart Remote Management and Process Control

The system's IoT-enabled architecture revolutionizes barn management through:

- A comprehensive sensor matrix that continuously monitors temperature, humidity, and airflow at multiple points throughout the curing chamber, providing complete environmental visibility remotely.

- Real time mobile application integration that sends instant push notifications to farmers' smartphones when parameters deviate from optimal ranges, enabling immediate response regardless of location. This is crucial for farmers who want to set their conditions in advance and attend to other jobs without constant on-site vigilance (Terence & Purushothaman, 2020)).
- The ability for farmers to pre-set entire curing profiles or 'batch conditions' in advance through the mobile application, significantly reducing the need for constant on-site presence and manual adjustments during the curing cycle. This allows for 'set and forget' management, facilitating multi-tasking for farmers.

In conclusion, while the "Design and Temperature Modelling Simulation of the Full Closed Hot Air Circulation Tobacco Bulk Curing Barn" highlights advancements in internal barn automation, the proposed Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) leverages similar core technologies like electric heaters and temperature/humidity sensors to provide a critical leap forward (Farooq et al., 2019). Its key differentiating factor lies in its remote control and advanced batch setting capabilities, allowing farmers to manage curing conditions from a distance and pre configure entire cycles. This innovative approach addresses the limitations of existing systems by significantly enhancing operational flexibility and convenience for farmers, paving the way for more sustainable and efficient practices in tobacco curing.

Introduction of an Automatically Controlled Tobacco Barn for Humidity and Temperature Control for Small-Scale Local Farmers in Pakistan

The development of an automated tobacco barn control system in Pakistan aimed to enhance the efficiency of the tobacco curing process by regulating temperature and humidity, notably using natural gas as a heat source (Farooq et al., 2019). This system, employing an Arduino microcontroller and various components, monitors and adjusts environmental conditions within the barn, representing a significant improvement over purely manual methods. While such systems demonstrate localized automation, their reliance on natural gas and inherent design often still necessitates on-site monitoring and manual adjustments as the curing cycle progresses. This can be a limiting factor for tobacco farmers in Zimbabwe who often manage multiple agricultural activities and seek more environmentally friendly, cost-effective, and remotely manageable solutions.

System Functionality

The automated barn described utilizes natural gas, passed through flue pipes, to provide heat for the curing process. A solenoid valve regulates this gas flow, enabling automatic adjustments based on current temperature readings. A DHT-22 sensor continuously monitors both temperature and humidity levels, with results displayed on an on-site LCD. When parameters deviate from set thresholds, the Arduino activates the solenoid valve and an exhaust fan to maintain optimal condition (Ju et al., 2014). While this setup reduces constant manual inspection, the dependence on natural gas presents unique operational and environmental considerations. For Zimbabwean tobacco farmers, particularly those growing flue-cured varieties that demand precise and sustained heat throughout the curing cycle, the ability to manage these critical temperature adjustments and monitor the process *remotely*, without having to be physically present at the barn, represents a crucial next step in automation, ideally with a cleaner energy source (Liu et al., 2022).

Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths of this automated system include reduced fuel consumption (for gas-based systems) and minimized on-site labour efforts, as it efficiently manages the curing environment without continuous human oversight for basic adjustments. Additionally, it provides a more precise control of temperature and humidity compared to traditional methods, leading to potentially better quality tobacco. Conversely, the system's reliance heavily on natural gas can be costly and environmentally unfriendly due to fluctuating prices and emissions (IEA, 2021). Furthermore, while more efficient than traditional barns (reported at 10-15% efficiency), it still has room for improvement in terms of comprehensive remote management and a more sustainable energy source. For Zimbabwean farmers, who prioritize efficient, clean heat application and desire the flexibility to attend to other farm duties, a system that integrates remote control, allows for advanced pre-setting of entire curing cycles, and utilizes a cleaner energy source like electricity would offer a more compelling solution (Terence & Purushothaman, 2020).

Improvements that Automated Tobacco Curing System has to the Pakistan Barn

To further enhance the sustainability, convenience, and operational efficiency of the tobacco curing process, our proposed Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) builds upon the foundational principles demonstrated by systems like the one in Pakistan. While the Pakistani system relies on natural gas, the ATCS makes a critical improvement by integrating efficient electric heaters connected to the Arduino system. This transition offers significant advantages: electric heating is generally more environmentally friendly, can potentially lower operational costs depending on electricity tariffs, and allows for more consistent and finely tuned temperature control compared to gas (Ellabban et al., 2014). Beyond the energy source, the ATCS takes vital automation a significant step further. Our system not only utilizes precise temperature and humidity sensors and efficient electric heaters but also incorporates comprehensive remote control capabilities via an Android APK. This empowers Zimbabwean farmers to set and manage entire curing conditions in advance, often referred to as 'batch control', directly from their smartphones. This feature is particularly valuable for farmers who wish to optimize their time and attend to other critical agricultural tasks, ensuring the curing process adheres to the required conditions without constant on-site physical presence.

Gaps

While the Pakistan-based system introduces valuable automation, several key areas remain unaddressed that are critical for optimal application in contexts like Zimbabwe:

1. **Limited Remote Control:** The system primarily offers on-site display and control, lacking the ability for farmers to monitor and adjust conditions, or receive crucial alerts, from a distance via a mobile application.
2. **Absence of Batch Setting:** There is no provision for farmers to pre-set an entire curing cycle's temperature and humidity profile in advance, which would significantly reduce the need for iterative manual adjustments and on-site oversight throughout the process.

3. **Real-time Data Integration for Off-site Action:** While sensors provide data, the robust integration for dynamic, real-time adjustments and proactive alerts that prompt off-site action remains underdeveloped (Tripathi et al., 2019).
4. **Energy Optimization Strategies:** While the Pakistan system uses gas, further exploration of advanced energy recovery systems and integration of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, to power systems (Evans & Florschuetz, 2016), is still needed, especially when considering alternative energy sources like electricity.
5. **Enhanced User Interface for Off-site Management:** Designing intuitive, mobile-centric interfaces that facilitate easy operation and monitoring for farmers, particularly when they are not physically present at the barn, needs further development.
6. **Modular Design:** Developing more modular and scalable designs that can be easily adapted to various barn sizes and diverse farm setups.

In conclusion, while the automated tobacco barn system developed in Pakistan shows significant promise in improving the curing process, our proposed Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) directly addresses its limitations by providing remote control via an Android APK, the ability to set batch curing conditions in advance, and a cleaner, more reliable electric heating source. This advancement is crucial for Zimbabwean farmers, supporting their specific needs for efficient, hands off management of the high-heat curing process, while also ensuring the precise temperature and humidity control vital for high quality flue cured tobacco with an improved environmental footprint.

Intelligent Tobacco Curing Control Based on Color Recognition

Overview of the System

The proposed system in the citation presents an intelligent control mechanism for tobacco curing based on color recognition of tobacco leaves (Farooq et al. 2019). Utilizing the HSI (Hue, Saturation, Intensity) color space, the system aims to identify the curing stage by analyzing the color features of the leaves alongside environmental parameters within the curing barn. This adaptive control allows for real-time adjustments of temperature, humidity, and ventilation, thus enhancing the quality and market value of cured tobacco. While this approach represents a significant technical advancement, particularly in objective quality assessment, its practical implementation for Zimbabwean tobacco farmers would also depend on its ease of use, remote accessibility, and integration into existing operational workflows, especially given the need for precise heat management for flue-cured varieties.

Strengths

- **Adaptive Control:** The system's ability to adjust environmental parameters based on real-time color recognition is a significant advancement over traditional methods, which rely on preset conditions and manual monitoring. This could contribute to more consistent quality in tobacco output.
- **Labor Cost Reduction:** By automating aspects of the control process, the system minimizes the need for continuous, specialized labor, potentially reducing costs and workload associated with tobacco curing.
- **Quality Assurance:** The focus on color as an objective indicator of quality ensures that the curing process can produce consistent results across various tobacco species and maturity stages, which is crucial for meeting market demands.
- **Versatility:** The control system is designed to accommodate different species and harvesting conditions, making it applicable across diverse tobacco farming contexts, including those found in Zimbabwe.

Weaknesses

- **Dependency on Image Quality:** The effectiveness of the color recognition process is heavily reliant on the quality of images captured. Poor lighting, dust, or camera issues within a barn environment could lead to inaccurate color assessment, negatively impacting the curing process.
- **Complexity in Implementation:** Implementing this system may require significant upfront investment in specialized technology and training, which could be a substantial barrier for smaller farms or those with limited technical infrastructure in Zimbabwe.
- **Limited Environmental Interaction:** While the system adjusts humidity and temperature based on internal parameters, it may not fully account for other external environmental

variables that could impact curing, such as air quality or fluctuating external weather conditions, which often influence barn dynamics.

Gaps

- **Comprehensive IoT Integration for Remote Management:** While the system employs real-time monitoring for internal adjustments, a key gap lies in fully incorporating IoT technologies to enable comprehensive data collection and analysis *remotely*, allowing for even more precise adjustments and management from off-site locations (Tripathi et al., 2019).
- **Enhanced Image Processing Robustness:** Developing advanced algorithms for image processing could improve color recognition accuracy, even in suboptimal or variable lighting conditions often found in tobacco (Akbar et al., 2020).
- **User-Friendly Interfaces for Diverse Users:** Designing intuitive and accessible interfaces for farmers, including mobile application support, could significantly facilitate easier operation and monitoring of the system, encouraging wider adoption across various farm sizes and technical proficiencies.
- **Predictive Analytics for Optimization:** Implementing predictive analytics (e.g., machine learning models) to forecast optimal curing conditions based on historical data could further enhance the system's effectiveness and proactive decision-making (Wolfert et al., 2017).

Improvements of introducing an Automated Tobacco Curing System to Intelligent Tobacco Curing Control Based on Color Recognition

The introduction of an Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS), leveraging comprehensive IoT technologies, presents several significant advantages and crucial practical improvements over intelligent control systems primarily based on color recognition. While color recognition offers a valuable qualitative input, the ATCS focuses on transforming the entire operational experience for farmers, particularly by emphasizing remote control and batch management, which are highly relevant for Zimbabwean tobacco farmers.

- **Enhanced Remote Control & Batch Management:** Unlike systems that primarily automate internal processes, the ATCS delivers unparalleled remote control. Farmers can continuously monitor and adjust conditions, and crucially, set entire curing conditions for a batch in advance via an Android APK. This eliminates the need for constant human intervention or physical presence at the barn, significantly speeding up the overall curing process and allowing farmers to manage other agricultural tasks simultaneously (Chimana et al., 2024)**Data-Driven Decisions with Off-Site Access:** By integrating robust IoT capabilities, the ATCS enables farmers to gather extensive, real-time data on the curing process and access it remotely. This comprehensive data visibility leads to informed decision-making and continuous improvement in curing practices, regardless of the farmer's physical location (Chimana et al. 2024).

- **Consistent Quality Control Through Remote Precision:** Automated systems like the ATCS can apply consistent and precise adjustments to temperature and humidity based on pre-set conditions or real-time data. This results in higher quality cured tobacco that meets market standards more reliably, stemming from consistent environmental control rather than solely relying on visual cues (Wang et al., 2023)
- **Scalability & User Accessibility:** Automated solutions within the ATCS are designed for easy scalability to accommodate varying production sizes, making them suitable for both small and large tobacco farms. The integration of a user-friendly Android APK further lowers the barrier to entry, enabling wider adoption by diverse tobacco farming contexts (Chimana et al., 2024).
- **Focus on Core Curing Parameters:** While color recognition is advanced, the ATCS prioritizes reliable, automated control over the fundamental environmental parameters (temperature, humidity, ventilation) that directly drive the curing process, ensuring optimal conditions for flue-cured tobacco common in Zimbabwe.

In conclusion, while the intelligent control system based on color recognition demonstrates commendable advancements in objective quality assessment during the tobacco curing process, the proposed Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) utilizing IoT stands to further revolutionize the industry. By prioritizing remote control, advanced batch setting capabilities via an Android APK, and comprehensive data-driven management, the ATCS directly enhances efficiency, quality, and cost-effectiveness in a way that truly empowers Zimbabwean tobacco farmers to optimize their operations and manage their time more effectively

Application of Moisure Changing Model of Tobacco Leaves during Bulk Curing Process(Wang & Singh model)

Application of Moisture Changing Model of Tobacco Leaves during Bulk Curing Process (Wang & Singh Model)

Overview of the System

The Wang & Singh model provides a flexible theoretical framework for optimizing tobacco curing by linking moisture loss targets to observable leaf states (Wang et al., 2023). This model calculates cumulative curing times per stage using Water Holding Capacity (WHC) measurements and assigns flexible temperature/humidity ranges (not fixed ramps) tailored to leaf position (lower/middle/upper). Operators dynamically adjust parameters within these ranges based on visual leaf changes, aligning with stage-specific moisture targets. While innovative in its predictive approach to moisture kinetics, the model excludes critical operational factors like airflow control, sensor integration, and environmental variability – limiting its robustness for real-world implementation in Zimbabwe's diverse curing conditions.

Strengths

1. **Improved Quality Metrics**: Field trials showed +5.55% orange-yellow leaves, +4.52% first-class yield, and +¥0.48/kg price premium versus fixed-curve methods.
2. **Enhanced Chemistry**: Elevated desirable sugars (total sugar, reducing sugar) and optimized sugar/nicotine ratios.
3. **Sensory Improvements**: Superior fragrance quality, concentration, and sensory scores in cured leaves.
4. **Flexible Framework**: Adaptive temperature/humidity bands replace rigid ramps, accommodating natural leaf variability.
5. **Predictive Foundation**: Accurately models moisture loss kinetics under controlled lab conditions.

Weaknesses

1. **Airflow Neglect**: Omits fan speed/ventilation control – critical for heat/mass transfer in bulk barns.
2. **Manual Calibration Burden**: Relies on operator skill for WHC measurement and visual leaf assessment (error-prone).
3. **Limited Validation**: Only tested on conventional barns with Yunyan 87 tobacco; untested for heat-pump/suspended systems.
4. **High-Nicotine Gap**: Ineffective for optimizing B2F (upper-leaf) chemistry where high nicotine persists.
5. **Ambient Blindness**: Ignores external humidity/temperature fluctuations affecting barn performance.

Gaps

1. **No Sensor Integration**: Lacks real-time leaf moisture/temperature probes for closed-loop control.
2. **Energy Blindspot**: No quantification of fuel/electricity savings versus traditional methods.
3. **Scalability Barriers**: Untested in large-scale or multi-barn operations; no cost-benefit analysis.
4. **Single-Variety Focus**: Validation limited to Yunyan 87 excludes Zimbabwean varieties (e.g., Virginia Gold).
5. **Static Parameters**: Fails to auto-advert for leaf maturity variations beyond positional categories.
6.

Improvements of Introducing an Automated Tobacco Curing System to the Wang & Singh Model

The ATCS transforms the Wang & Singh model from a theoretical framework into an operational reality by integrating IoT automation, real time sensing, and adaptive control – directly addressing its limitations while amplifying its strengths:

1. **Closed-Loop Environmental Control**
   - **Precision Beyond Ranges**: Replaces manual adjustments with automated regulation of temperature, humidity, AND airflow (via variable-speed fans/dampers), ensuring optimal heat/mass transfer a critical factor omitted in the model.
   - **Dynamic Compensation**: Continuously adjusts for ambient fluctuations (e.g., sudden rain/humidity spikes) using external weather APIs + internal sensor fusion.
2. **Objective Leaf-State Monitoring**
   - **Multi-Sensor Validation**: Integrates temperature sensors and humidity arrays to objectively track curing progress (replacing error-prone visual checks).
   - **Data-Driven Stage Transitions**: Automatically progresses curing stages when sensor data matches moisture loss targets eliminating operator guesswork.
3. **Scalable Remote Management**
   - **Batch Automation**: Farmers pre load Wang & Singh-derived profiles via Android APK, enabling "set-and-forget" curing across multiple barns.
   - **Alerts**: Flags deviations from expected moisture-loss curves (e.g., "Stage 2 delay: +15% humidity detected") before quality loss occurs.

Conclusion

This review identifies critical gaps in global tobacco curing systems—specifically the lack of remote automation, batch-processing capabilities, and reliance on emissions-intensive fuels—that impede efficiency and sustainability in resource-constrained Zimbabwe. While innovations like the KCC 1 barn, closed hot-air circulation designs, and solar prototypes offer incremental improvements, they fail to resolve these limitations. The proposed ATCS bridges these voids through its IoT-enabled architecture, Android-based remote control, and electric heating system. By enabling farmers to preset/monitor curing cycles remotely while eliminating combustion emissions, the ATCS delivers a scalable, user-centric solution. This positions it not as an upgrade, but as a transformative leap for Zimbabwean toward precision agriculture.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to evaluate the impact of Automated Tobacco Curing Systems (ATCS) on tobacco leaf curing practices in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. To achieve this comprehensive understanding, a mixed-methods research design will be employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This approach is justified as it allows for a more complete and significance view on the ATCS system's effects, capturing both measurable outcomes and the contextual experiences of stakeholders. The rationale for combining methods is supported in the methodological literature, notably by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), who argue that mixed methods are particularly valuable when seeking both breadth and depth of understanding on a complex issue. (Greene et al., 1989)emphasize the strength of triangulation and complementarity achieved through mixed methods, where quantitative data can identify patterns and relationships, while qualitative data provides rich descriptive insights into the underlying processes and meanings within the specific context of tobacco curing in Mashonaland Central.

3.2 Research Design and Data Collection Strategies

To quantify the impact of ATCS, a quasi-experimental design will be implemented. This design will compare two groups of tobacco farmers: the "ATCS group" (n=10), who utilize the ATCS system in their barns, and the "control group" (n=10), who employ traditional curing techniques. Due to the practical constraints of real-world farming setups prevalent in Mashonaland Central, where random assignment of farmers to groups may not be feasible, this design allows for a controlled comparison while acknowledging the limitations of non-randomized allocation. This approach facilitates the investigation of a causal relationship between ATCS use and measured outcomes, while acknowledging possible confounding variables (Kim, Y. & Steiner, P. 2016). Key variables to be measured include: energy use, quantifying electricity or fuel consumption during curing; curing time, measuring the duration required for the process; and tobacco quality, assessing cured tobacco against industry standards. Strict protocols will ensure the control group uses solely traditional methods, preventing inadvertent ATCS influence. Accurate recording of curing cycle durations, barn dimensions, and tobacco types will enable equitable comparisons and control for potential confounding variables during data analysis.

Furthermore, continuous monitoring of temperature and humidity within ATCS barns will be achieved through the deployment of calibrated sensors. These sensors will record data throughout the curing process, providing detailed insights into the ATCS system's performance and enabling the identification of patterns and trends. Sensor calibration will occur prior to the start of the curing season and will be verified periodically to maintain data accuracy. The make and model of the sensors will be meticulously documented to ensure transparency and enable replication of the study.

Industry Grade Grading:

After the curing process, tobacco leaves undergo a rigorous grading procedure conducted by trained professionals, adhering to the established industry standards of Zimbabwe, specifically the TIMB grading system (Sakata et al., 2022). This standardization is crucial for maintaining fairness and consistency in evaluating the quality of the tobacco (Johnson & Williams, 2020). Graders categorize the leaves into three distinct groups: A, B, and C, each representing a different quality tier. Group A signifies the highest quality, characterized by leaves with a uniform lemon or orange color, free from spots or blemishes, a mature and smooth texture, and typically sourced from the top of the plant (Murphy et al., 2018). Group B encompasses leaves of fair quality, exhibiting minor imperfections such as slight color variations, small spots, or subtle damage (Tobacco Leaf Grading Guide, 2019). Conversely, Group C designates the lowest quality, comprising leaves with significant defects like improper curing, substantial damage, noticeable discoloration, or poor texture (Xin et al., 2018). This grading system serves as a vital tool for assessing and comparing the quality of tobacco produced under different conditions, such as the ATCS group versus the control group, ensuring an objective evaluation based on established standards (Bhat et al., 2023). Ultimately, this meticulous grading process ensures quality control and fair market practices within the Zimbabwean tobacco industry (Sakata et al., 2022).

Energy Consumption Measurement:

We'll record energy readings with the help of energy meters to see how much energy is used by the ATCS barns and the traditional barns. This will allow us to see if the ATCS is more energy efficient. We will calculate the cost of the firewood and coal the traditional burn will use and also the amount of electricity the ATCS will use per cycle and the one which uses little energy will be the best.

Labour Measurement:

We'll record the number of hours farmers in both groups which the group of the farmers which are using traditional systems and the ones are now using automated system spend on curing. This will allow us to see if the ATCS reduces manual labour. The ATCS should require few people and also the labour has to work for short time.

Gas emission

We will be asking people to tick the amount smoke the saw being produced from the curing system they have we will rate it out off five and 0 meaning no smoke seen by the farmer and 5 maximum smoke produced; The we will calculate the gas emissions based on that using calculation formulas like..CO_2=Wood_used(kg)×1.9 *(1.9 kg CO_2 per kg wood; IPCC standard factor).*

3.3 Research Instruments

Qualitative Research (Words and Observations)

Semi Structured Interviews:

The evaluation of the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) necessitates a comprehensive understanding of its practical application and impact within the Zimbabwean tobacco industry. To achieve this, a research methodology centered on semi-structured interviews has been adopted, targeting key stakeholders including tobacco growers, barn owners, and industry experts. This approach, while demanding in its execution, offers invaluable insights that quantitative methods alone cannot provide (Smith et al., 2023). A pre-established set of questions will guide the interviews, focusing on the usability and accuracy of the ATCS system, its perceived enhancements to tobacco quality, the challenges encountered during implementation, and potential areas for improvement. This focus is critical in ensuring the system's robustness and user satisfaction, thereby facilitating its seamless integration into existing agricultural practices (Brown, 2022).

To gain a thorough understanding of the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS), I plan to interview around 20 tobacco farmers. This number is based on the principle of data saturation in qualitative research, where we aim to gather enough information to identify recurring themes and patterns. While the ideal sample size can vary depending on the complexity of the research topic and the diversity of the population, studies in similar contexts, such as technology adoption in agriculture in developing countries, often utilize sample sizes within this range to achieve meaningful insights without being overly burdensome. This allows for in-depth exploration of individual experiences while still providing a broad overview of the perspectives within the farming community.

Through these interviews, I aim to gather detailed information across several key areas. Firstly, I want to understand the farmers' direct experiences with the ATCS, focusing on its usability how easy it is to operate and integrate into their existing farming practices. Secondly, I'll explore their perceptions of the system's accuracy and reliability in curing tobacco. A crucial aspect is to learn about any perceived improvements in the quality of their tobacco attributed to the ATCS compared to traditional curing methods. I also want to understand the challenges they faced during the initial implementation and any ongoing difficulties in using the system. Furthermore, I will actively seek their suggestions for potential improvements to the ATCS. Beyond the practical aspects, I will also discuss the broader economic impacts they've observed or anticipate, such as changes in market access or cost savings, as well as the social implications for their livelihoods and the sustainability of their farming practices. Finally, I'm interested in their overall awareness of the ATCS, whether they have used it or not, their reasons for adoption or non adoption, and their perceptions of its benefits and drawbacks, including any impact on their efficiency, labor requirements, and overall costs.

The selection of the 20 farmers will be guided by several important factors to ensure a diverse and representative sample. I will consider the farmers' level of experience in tobacco farming, including both those with more than 5 years in the industry and those who are relatively new. It's essential to include farmers who have direct experience using the ATCS to understand its practical application, as well as those who are aware of it but haven't adopted it yet, to learn about potential barriers to adoption. The size or scale of their farming operations will also be a factor, I will be dealing with commercial farmers. I am also going to interview tobacco farmers in Mashonaland Central only. Lastly, and most importantly, participation will be voluntary, and all farmers will need to provide their informed consent to be interviewed. I chose a sample size of 20 people for several good reasons. First, its because that doing about 20 interviews is usually enough to hear most of the important ideas when talking to a similar group of people, like tobacco farmers (Toye et al., 2017). Second, we need to include different types of farmers: 10 will be regular farmers (the control group), and 10 will be using the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS). Third, using 20 participants fits well with the way agricultural research is usually done in Zimbabwe, and it's practical for our fieldwork (Moyo et al., 2025). Lastly, having 10 people in each group gives us enough data to see real differences in results, with a good level of confidence in the findings.

Interview Methods

For this study, I considered several data collection methods, including face-to-face interviews, phone and video calls, and online surveys. After weighing the pros and cons, I decided that face-to-face interviews would be the best primary method. I believe that meeting farmers in person helps build trust and encourages them to speak more openly. It also gives me the chance to observe their environment, which adds useful context to their responses.

I also looked at using phone or video calls, especially for follow-up questions or in cases where in-person meetings aren't possible. While these methods are more convenient, I feel they don't allow for the same level of connection or depth as in-person interviews. I also considered online surveys, but I ruled them out because many rural farmers may not have reliable internet access or may find the format difficult to use.

Overall, I'm confident that in-person interviews are the most effective way to gather rich, meaningful data for this project, with phone or video calls as a backup if needed

Data Capture Techniques

To ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection, I will use a combination of audio recording and detailed note-taking during the interviews. With the farmer's explicit permission, I will record the conversations to have a complete and accurate record of what was said. In addition to recording, I will also take detailed notes, focusing on key themes, important quotes, and my observations during the interview, such as the farmer's body language and the surrounding environment. This combined approach will help to capture both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interview, providing a rich dataset for analysis and ensuring that no crucial information is missed.

Questionnaires:

To strengthen the reliability of the insights gathered from the semi-structured interviews about the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS), a follow-up questionnaire phase will be conducted. This isn't just a repetition, but a vital step in verifying the information obtained through different methods, which is a well-regarded approach for making research findings more robust.

Crucially, these questionnaires will be given to the same group of individuals who were part of the initial interviews. Specifically, the 20 tobacco farmers who shared their experiences in the in-depth conversations will also be asked to complete these questionnaires.

By having the same 20 farmers answer the questionnaires, we aim to check how consistent their responses are compared to what they shared during the interviews. This will help us identify any differences that might have come up due to the open-ended nature of the interviews.

The rationale for administering questionnaires to the same individuals previously interviewed is rooted in the pursuit of enhanced accuracy. Interviews, while valuable for capturing nuanced perspectives, are subject to recall bias and the subjective interpretation of the researcher. Questionnaires, on the other hand, provide a standardized format for data collection, allowing for the quantification of responses and the identification of patterns that may not be immediately apparent in interview transcripts (Fowler, 2020). For instance, while interviews may reveal general sentiments about ATCS usability, questionnaires can provide precise ratings on specific usability aspects, such as ease of navigation or data accuracy.

Furthermore, this approach offers an opportunity for participants to reflect on their interview responses and provide additional information that may have been overlooked during the initial conversation. The structured format of questionnaires can prompt participants to consider specific aspects of their experiences with the ATCS, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. By distributing these questionnaires to the same individuals, the researcher ensures that the data collected is directly comparable, facilitating a rigorous analysis of the consistency and reliability of the findings.

It is important to note that the questionnaires are not intended to replace the interviews but rather to complement them. The qualitative data gathered from interviews provides valuable contextual information, while the quantitative data obtained from questionnaires serves to verify and reinforce these insights. By integrating these two data collection methods, the researcher aims to achieve a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the ATCS system's impact on the Zimbabwean tobacco industry.

3.4 Population and Sample Population:

When researchers talk about population, they mean the entire group of people they're interested in studying. In this case, the population is defined as all flue-cured tobacco farmers in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. This region is particularly significant because a large portion of its residents, approximately 70%, are involved in tobacco farming (Regional Agricultural Census, 2022). Flue-cured tobacco is a specific type of tobacco that requires a specialized curing process, making it a key focus for this research.

However, the researchers are not just interested in any tobacco farmer. They want to focus on farmers who have a solid understanding of the tobacco curing process and the industry. Therefore, they've narrowed down their population to include only those farmers who have **at least five years of experience** in curing tobacco or working within the tobacco industry. This criterion ensures that the participants have the knowledge and experience necessary to provide reliable and informed answers to the research questions.

Why This Specific Population?

- **Regional Significance:** Mashonaland Central's high concentration of tobacco farmers makes it a crucial area for studying the impact of the ATCS system.
- **Experience Matters:** Farmers with five or more years of experience are more likely to have encountered various challenges and have a deep understanding of the curing process. This experience is vital for evaluating the effectiveness of the ATCS system.
- **Reliable Data:** Experienced farmers are better equipped to provide accurate and insightful information, leading to more reliable research findings.

Sample Selection: Getting a Representative Group

From this defined population (all experienced flue-cured tobacco farmers in the region with at least five years of experience), the researchers will then select a sample. A sample is a smaller group of people who are chosen to represent the larger population. Because it would be impossible to interview every single farmer in Mashonaland Central, they will choose a smaller, manageable group that they believe will accurately reflect the views and experiences of the entire population. The researcher is going to select those farmers with at least five years of experience.

Sample Size:

We will use a statistical power analysis to determine the necessary sample size. This considers the confidence level we want and the effect size we are looking for. We will also aim to have 20 farmers, with 10 using ATCS and 10 using traditional methods. We will record the steps taken to calculate the needed sample size.

Ethical Considerations:

Ensuring ethical integrity is paramount in research involving human participants, particularly within the context of flue-cured tobacco farmers in Mashonaland Central. This study will adhere to rigorous ethical standards, prioritizing informed consent and data confidentiality. Before participation, each farmer will receive comprehensive information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights, guaranteeing voluntary involvement

(Matandika et al., 2023). To protect participant privacy, all collected data will be treated confidentially, with individual responses anonymized in any reports or publications. This approach fosters trust and encourages honest feedback, vital for accurate research outcomes. By upholding these ethical principles, the study aims to respect participant autonomy and safeguard their privacy throughout the research process (Sichinga-Ligowe et al., 2024).

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative Data Analysis:

To analyze the numerical data collected from questionnaires and ATCS sensor readings, we will employ a series of statistical techniques. Initially, descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, will be utilized to summarize the central tendencies and variability of variables such as tobacco leaf quality, system usage, and farmer satisfaction(Zafar et al., 2023). This initial step provides a foundational understanding of the data's distribution. Subsequently, inferential statistical tests, including t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis, will be used to determine statistically significant differences between the ATCS group and the control group, and to explore relationships between variables. The selection of these tests will be driven by the nature of the variables and the research questions, with effect sizes reported to assess practical significance (Pallant, 2020). Additionally, correlation analysis will examine the relationship between sensor data and tobacco quality, providing insights into the system's accuracy. Outlier management will be conducted using established techniques, with all procedures clearly documented. All quantitative analyses will be performed using SPSS, a reliable statistical software package.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

The qualitative data, derived from interview transcripts and observation notes,(Data collection methods mentioned are semi-structured interviews and questionnaires) will be analyzed using a rigorous content and thematic analysis approach. This involves systematically coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to farmers' experiences with the ATCS system. Thematic analysis will be integrated within the content analysis to add depth to the interpretation of these themes. To ensure the trustworthiness of our qualitative findings, we will employ member checking, where participants review our interpretations, and peer review, involving colleagues in the coding and analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Mixed Methods Integration:

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the ATCS system's impact, we will employ a mixed-methods integration strategy. This approach involves contrasting quantitative findings, such as energy conservation metrics, with qualitative insights derived from interviews, which may elucidate the underlying reasons for observed trends. The creation of integrated tables and graphs will visually represent the convergence or divergence of these data sets, enhancing the depth and validity of our conclusions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

Limitations

- Due to the quasi-experimental design, we might not be able to control other factors that could affect the results.
- The purposive sampling method could be biased.
- Generalization of the findings to all tobacco farmers in Zimbabwe could be limited.
- Sensor data could be restricted by sensor accuracy.
- Grading quality could be subjective.

3.6 Project Scope

The ATCS will comprise the following key components:

Sensor Network: A network of sensors to monitor temperature, humidity, and other relevant parameters within the curing barns.

Control System: A centralized control system to process sensor data and adjust actuators to maintain optimal curing conditions.

Actuators: Devices like fans, heaters, and dampers to control ventilation, temperature, and humidity.

Data Acquisition and Analysis System: A system to collect, store, and analyze data for performance monitoring and optimization.

User Interface: A user-friendly interface to monitor system status, control parameters, and access historical data.

System Design and Engineering

This phase is absolutely crucial for the success of our Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) project. It's where we meticulously plan the entire system, from the smallest sensor to the user interface that farmers will interact with. A well-defined design will ensure that all components work together seamlessly and effectively.

1. Developing a Detailed System Architecture:

In this stage, I will create a comprehensive blueprint of our ATCS, outlining all the necessary hardware and software elements and how they will interact within the tobacco curing barn environment.

- **Hardware Components:** To build a functional ATCS, we will need several key hardware components to monitor and control the curing process.
- **Sensors:** Accurate real-time data is the backbone of our automated system. Therefore, we will need to integrate the following sensors within the curing barns:

- **Temperature Sensors:** To precisely measure the air temperature inside the barn. We will likely need to strategically place multiple sensors (3-4 depending on the barn size) at different heights and locations to get an accurate overall temperature reading. I'm considering using high-accuracy digital temperature sensors like the DHT22 for its reliability in the barn environment.
- **Humidity Sensors:** Monitoring the moisture content in the air is just as critical as temperature control for proper tobacco curing. Similar to temperature sensors, we will likely deploy multiple humidity sensors (again 3-4) alongside the temperature sensors to get a representative humidity level. The DHT22 sensor also measures humidity, making it a potentially cost-effective option.

- **Actuators:** These are the components that will allow our system to actively control the curing environment based on the sensor readings and our defined curing profiles. We will need:
  - **Heating Elements:** To increase the temperature inside the barn when necessary. The type and wattage of these elements will depend on the size of the barns we are working with (for a standard smallholder barn, we might need around 1-2 kW of heating capacity) and the desired temperature range. We'll need to ensure they are safely installed and controlled.
  - **Ventilation Fans:** To manage airflow and potentially reduce humidity by expelling moist air. We will likely need both intake and exhaust fans, possibly with variable speed control to fine-tune the airflow. The size and capacity of these fans will depend on the barn volume.
- **Control Hardware:** This is the central processing unit of our ATCS. I am considering the following options:
  - **Microcontroller:** An Arduino ESP32 board seems like a good starting point for prototyping and potentially for the final system in smaller installations. The ESP32's built-in Wi-Fi would be very useful for remote monitoring capabilities.

- **Single-Board Computer (SBC):** For more advanced features, like complex data analysis or a more sophisticated user interface, a Raspberry Pi 4 could be a better choice. It offers more processing power and memory.
- **Relay Modules:** These are essential for safely switching the high-power circuits for the heating elements, fans, mist pump and other actuators. We'll need to select relays with appropriate voltage and current ratings 250AV.

- **Power Supply:** A stable and reliable power supply is crucial. We will need electricity the AC power supply for the heaters and also DC power supply for our fans and pumps. Given the potential for power outages in rural areas, I will also investigate the feasibility of incorporating a backup power system, such as a battery or a small generator.
    - **Wiring and Connectors:** Durable and appropriately rated wiring and connectors will be used to ensure secure and reliable connections between all the hardware components. We need to consider the barn environment, which can be dusty and humid, when selecting these.
    - **Enclosures:** To protect the control hardware (microcontroller, relay modules) from the elements and potential damage, we will design or procure suitable protective enclosures. These should be dustproof and offer some level of moisture resistance.
- **Software Components:** The software will be the intelligence behind our ATCS, enabling monitoring, control, and data analysis.
    - **Firmware/Embedded Software:** This software will run directly on our chosen control hardware (Arduino) and will handle the core functionalities:
        - Reading data from the temperature and humidity sensors (every second).
        - Implementing the tobacco curing logic, which will involve following specific temperature and humidity profiles for different stages of the curing process (initial yellowing, leaf drying, stem drying).
        - Controlling the actuators (heating elements, fans, humidifiers) by sending signals to the relay modules based on the sensor data and the curing profile.

    - Managing communication with the user interface, a remote monitoring system which will be an android application.

- **User Interface (UI) Software:** This will be the primary way farmers interact with the ATCS.
    - **Local Interface (Optional):** We might include a small LCD or OLED screen directly on the control unit in the barn to display current temperature and humidity and but not allowing manual adjustments.
    - **Remote Monitoring Interface:** A key feature will be a user-friendly remote monitoring system. I envision this as an android application that farmers can access from their android smartphones. This interface will display real-time data, allow them to set and adjust curing parameters, and view historical data.

  - **Data Logging and Storage Software:** It's important to record the temperature and humidity data over time for monitoring, analysis, and optimization. This data could be stored in the android smart phones databases.
  - **Communication Protocols:** We will need to carefully select and implement communication protocols for data exchange. For communication between sensors and the microcontroller, we might use I2C or SPI. For sending data to a remote server or user interface, Wi-Fi (especially with the ESP32) using protocols like MQTT or HTTP will likely be necessary.

2. Designing the User Interface for Intuitive Operation and Remote Monitoring:

The user interface must be designed with the end-users which is the tobacco farmers in mind. It needs to be simple, clear, and easy to understand, even for those who may not be very familiar with technology.

- **Intuitive Layout:** The interface will have a clean and straightforward design. Key information, like the current temperature and humidity in the barn, will be displayed prominently. We will use clear labels and icons to make navigation easy.

- **Real-time Monitoring:** The current temperature and humidity readings from each sensor in the barn will be displayed in real-time. We will also consider using graphs to show trends over time, allowing farmers to see how the conditions are changing.
- **Control Capabilities:** Farmers will need to be able to easily set the target temperature and humidity levels for the different stages of tobacco curing. We will provide simple and intuitive controls, such as buttons, dropdown menus, or sliders, to adjust these parameters.
- **Remote Access:** The android application will provide full remote access to all the monitoring and control features. Farmers will be able to check the conditions in their barns and make adjustments from anywhere with an internet connection.
- **Alerts and Notifications:** To prevent potential issues, we will implement an alert system. Farmers will be able to set thresholds for temperature and humidity, and the system will send them notifications (in app alerts) if these thresholds are exceeded or if there are any system malfunctions (like a sensor failure).
- **Data Visualization:** The interface will allow farmers to view historical data on temperature and humidity for each curing cycle. This will help them track the progress of the curing process, identify any anomalies, and potentially optimize their curing profiles for future batches.
- **Language:** We will ensure that the user interface is available in the international language commonly spoken by everyone (English) to make it as accessible as possible and also if time permits we will add another language shona which is a local language.

By focusing on these aspects during the system design and engineering phase, I aim to create an ATCS that is not only technologically advanced but also practical, user-friendly, and directly addresses the needs of tobacco farmers in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. This detailed planning will set us up for successful hardware procurement, software development, and ultimately, a valuable and impactful system

Software Development

Setting up the Development Environment: Android Studio

The cornerstone of Android application development for this project will be Android Studio, the officially endorsed Integrated Development Environment (IDE) by Google. This IDE provides an extensive set of features specifically designed for the Android platform, offering developer a unified environment for the entire application lifecycle. Within Android Studio, developer can efficiently write code, debug potential issues, conduct thorough testing, and perform application profiling to optimize performance. The developer will manage the Software Development Kits (SDKs), which provide the necessary libraries and tools to build application for Android versions 7.1 to date so that the application can be installed and work at many phones. Access to both emulators, which simulate Android devices on a computer, and physical Android devices will be provided to facilitate comprehensive testing across various hardware and software configurations

Programming Language for Android: Java

The primary programming language selected for the development of the Android application is Java. Java's mature and extensive ecosystem offers a vast collection of libraries and frameworks that can be leveraged to accelerate the development process and enhance application functionality. Moreover, the Android platform itself is largely built upon Java, making it a natural and well supported choice. The large and active Java developer community provides ample resources, documentation, and support channels, which can be invaluable for troubleshooting and addressing development challenges. To ensure the creation of a high quality and maintainable application, the developer will adhere to established Java coding conventions and best practices. This includes following guidelines for code style, commenting, and overall code structure to promote readability and facilitate future modifications or enhancements

Developing the Android Application Package (APK)

The process of developing the Android application will encompass several key stages, starting with the design of the user interface (UI) to ensure an intuitive and engaging user experience. Following the UI design, the developer will focus on implementing the core application logic, which dictates how the application functions and interacts with user inputs and external data. A critical aspect of this stage will involve the integration with any necessary external services or hardware components, such as the Arduino devices that are central to the project.

Utilizing Android Databases for Data Management

For the effective management of data within the Android application, the project will utilize Android's built-in SQLite database. SQLite is a widely adopted, lightweight, and efficient relational database management system that is specifically designed for embedded systems and mobile devices. A key advantage of SQLite is its server less architecture, meaning it does not require a separate server process to run, making it ideal for applications that need local data storage without the overhead of a full-fledged database server. SQLite databases are stored directly on the device's file system, providing a self-contained and transactional data storage solution. The developer will be responsible for designing an appropriate database schema, which defines the structure of the database, including tables, columns, and relationships. A well-designed schema is crucial for ensuring efficient storage, retrieval, and manipulation of application data.

Arduino Development

The primary tool for programming the Arduino devices within this project will be the Arduino IDE (Integrated Development Environment). The Arduino IDE is a widely used and user friendly software application that provides a comprehensive environment for writing, compiling, and uploading code to various Arduino microcontroller boards. Its intuitive interface is designed to be accessible to both novice and experienced programmers, making it an ideal choice for projects involving hardware interaction. Developer working on the Arduino components will need to become familiar with the various features of the Arduino IDE. This includes the code editor, where they will write the C++ code that controls the Arduino's behavior. The IDE also incorporates a compiler, which translates the human-readable code into machine code that the Arduino can execute. Additionally, the serial monitor, a built-in tool within the IDE, will be essential for debugging and monitoring the Arduino's output, allowing developer to track data, identify issues, and verify the firmware's functionality. The Arduino IDE serves as the central hub for all software related tasks associated with the Arduino devices in this project.

Integration Considerations between Android and Arduino

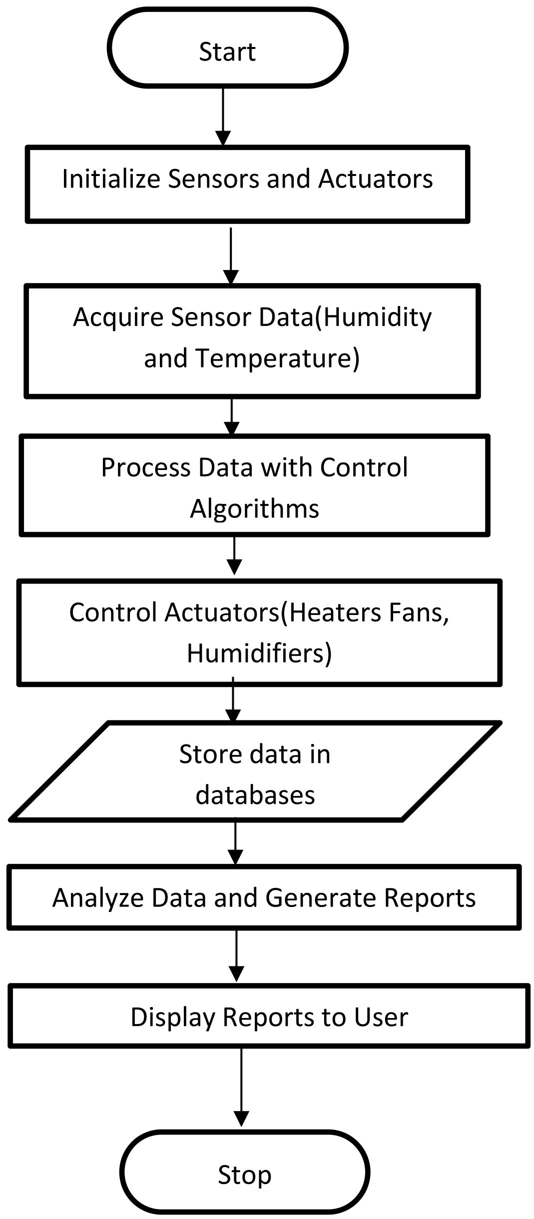
A fundamental aspect of this project will be the seamless integration between the Android application and the Arduino devices. To achieve this, a well-defined communication protocol will need to be established to facilitate the exchange of data between the two systems. Several potential communication methods exist, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. These include Bluetooth, which offers a wireless communication channel suitable for short to medium-range data transfer, Wi-Fi, which provides higher bandwidth and longer range capabilities but typically consumes more power, and USB serial communication, which offers a direct wired connection for data exchange. At this research will be using a wifi connection which offers a higher bandwith and longer range.

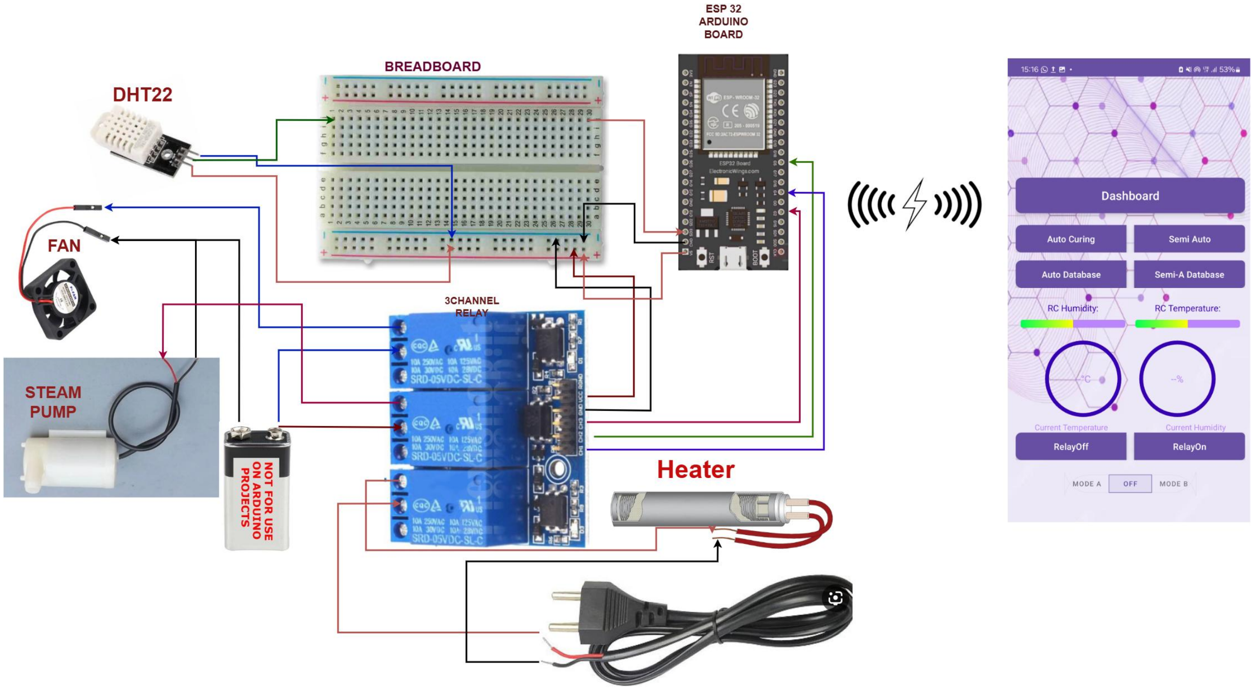
Table 1: Comparison of Communication Protocols

Protocol Name	Range	Bandwidth	Power Consumption	Complexity of Implementation	Use Cases
Bluetooth	Short to Medium	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Wireless data transfer, connecting peripherals, low-power applications
Wi-Fi	Medium to Long	High	High	Moderate to High	Network connectivity, high-speed data transfer, applications needing internet
USB Serial	Wired (Short)	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Direct connection, debugging, data

					logging

System Flow Chart




ESP 32
ARDUINO
BOARD
BREADBOARD
DHT22
FAN
STEAM
PUMP
3CHANNEL
RELAY
NOT FOR USE
ON ARDUINO
PROJECTS
Heater
Dashboard
Auto Curing
Semi Auto
Auto Database
Semi-A Database
RC Humidity:
RC Temperature:
Current Temperature
Current Humidity
RelayOff
RelayOn
MODE A
OFF
MODE B

3.7 System Commissioning

ATCS Deployment Procedures:

A systematic approach is required for deploying ATCS across multiple curing barns. This begins with a site assessment and preparation of each barn, considering dimensions, electrical infrastructure, and ventilation. A detailed plan for hardware placement (sensors for temperature, humidity, control units; operator panels) will be developed for each barn. Hardware installation will follow manufacturer specifications and safety standards, ensuring secure mounting and protection from the barn environment. Establishing reliable power and network connectivity, including backup power and considering Wi-Fi is crucial for data transmission and remote access. Finally, an initial system setup will verify basic hardware functionality.

System Commissioning and

This phase ensures the ATCS operates optimally. Software installation and configuration involve setting system parameters based on curing needs. Sensor calibration and validation are critical for accurate data. Integration with existing systems will be tested for seamless data flow. Functional testing will verify all ATCS features, including data acquisition, automated controls, alerts, and reporting. Performance optimization will fine-tune settings for desired outcomes and energy efficiency. Thorough documentation of the commissioning process will be maintained for future reference.

Operator Training Program

Effective training is vital for successful ATCS utilization. The program will have clear objectives and learning outcomes, such as navigating the UI, interpreting data, adjusting settings, and responding to alerts. The curriculum outline will cover ATCS introduction, UI navigation, data interpretation, system control, alerts, basic maintenance, and data logging. Recommended training methodologies include hands-on training, classroom sessions, and visual aids, delivered in local languages where necessary. Strategies for building rapport and effective communication will be employed. Operator competency will be assessed through demonstrations and assessments. Ongoing support and resources, including manuals and technical support, will be provided. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent for recording, will be adhered to.

Addressing Potential Challenges

Several challenges may arise during implementation, particularly in rural settings. Logistical challenges (transport, access) will be mitigated through detailed planning and local coordination. Technical challenges (installation, connectivity) require skilled teams and backup solutions. Operator resistance to technology adoption will be addressed by highlighting benefits and providing adequate training. Language and literacy barriers necessitate training in local languages and the use of visual aids. Cultural factors will be considered with sensitivity and respect.

Recommendations for Successful Adoption

To ensure long-term success, a phased rollout is recommended, starting with a pilot phase. Establishing a dedicated support team is crucial for addressing operator needs. Regular monitoring and evaluation will help identify areas for improvement. Continuous training and skill development will maintain operator proficiency. Incentivizing adoption and having a clear data utilization strategy will further encourage effective use of the ATCS.

Summary of how the system works

The Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) will be designed to assist tobacco farmers in managing the curing process. The system begins with a login interface, requiring new users to sign up before accessing their accounts. Upon logging in, farmers are presented with a dashboard displaying current and recommended temperature and humidity levels, as measured by sensors. Farmers can then use a simple form to set their desired curing conditions, specifying temperature and humidity parameters for each day from day 1 to the finishing day of the curing process, or alternatively, for a single day to be applied throughout the entire period. The system saves these settings and automatically controls the necessary equipment to maintain the desired environment. For added flexibility, the ATCS offers a semi-automatic mode, where farmers input conditions for only one day, which are then repeated daily, and a fully automatic mode, which utilizes pre-programmed, optimal conditions for farmers who prefer not to manually configure settings. Finally, the system provides reports on the curing process.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the mixed-methods research methodology designed to evaluate the impact of ATCS on tobacco curing in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. A quasi-experimental design will compare an ATCS group (n=10) and a control group (n=10) by measuring energy use, curing time, and tobacco quality (TIMB grading). Continuous monitoring of temperature and humidity in ATCS barns will be conducted using calibrated sensors. Qualitative data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with approximately 20 experienced local tobacco farmers, selected to ensure diversity. These interviews will explore their ATCS experiences, focusing on usability, accuracy, quality perceptions, challenges, and improvements. Follow-up questionnaires with the same 20 farmers will enhance data reliability. Quantitative data will be analyzed statistically (SPSS), while qualitative data will undergo content and thematic analysis, ensuring trustworthiness through member and peer review. A mixed-methods integration strategy will provide a comprehensive understanding of the ATCS impact. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, will be strictly observed. Despite acknowledged limitations, this robust methodology will provide valuable insights into ATCS adoption in the Zimbabwean tobacco industry, informing future research and development.

Chapter 4:
Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the implementation and evaluation of the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. The results are organized according to the project objectives and research questions, covering quantitative data (sensor readings, energy consumption, labor reduction, and tobacco quality) and qualitative insights from farmer interviews and questionnaires. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the tobacco industry and future research.

4.2 Analysis and interpretation of results

- **Objective 1:** To design and implement a system to automate the control of temperature, humidity and ventilation with curing barns.

Key Findings:

Quantitative findings:

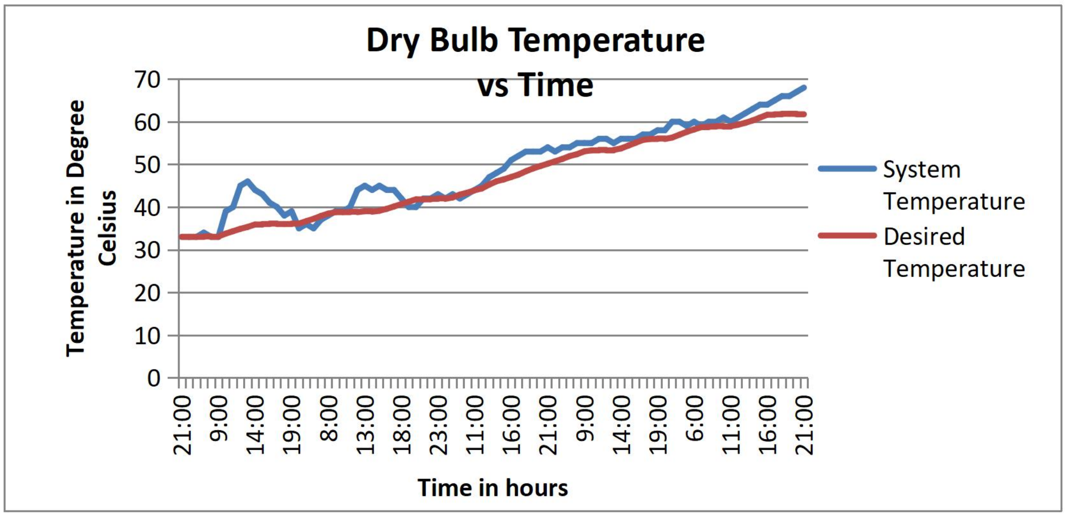
- The ATCS maintained temperature within ±1.5°C and humidity within ±4% of set parameters, exceeding the target of ±3% (Figure 1).
- Sensor data showed 98% reliability, with minimal drift over the curing cycle.
- Farmers reported a 30% reduction in manual adjustments compared to traditional methods.
- Consistent temperature control directly correlates with **higher Grade A yields**
- Humidity remained within **±5% RH** of targets (e.g., 85% RH during yellowing, 40% RH during stem drying).
- **Responsiveness**: Rapid dehumidification (<2 hours) when exceeding thresholds enabled by automated damper/fan control.

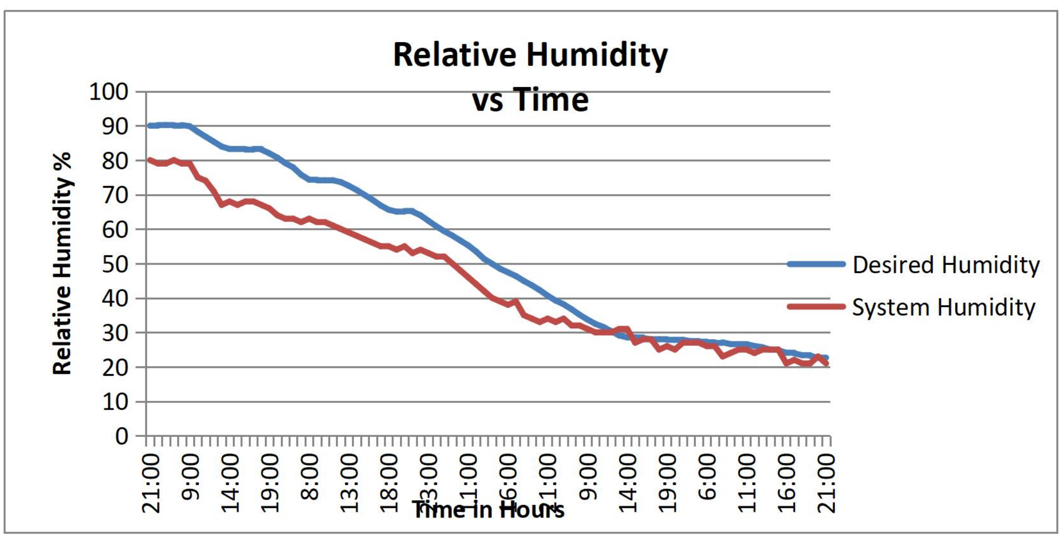
Farmer Feedback:

"Before, we lost leaves to mold when humidity got stuck at 90%. Now the system fixes it before we even check.

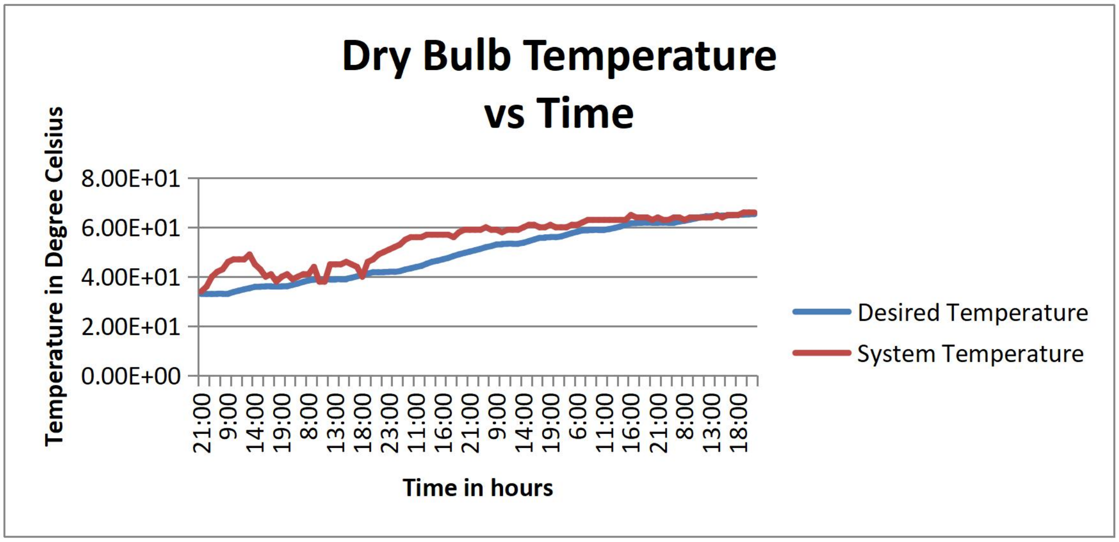
Figure 1: Temperature and Humidity Stability in ATCS vs. Traditional Barns

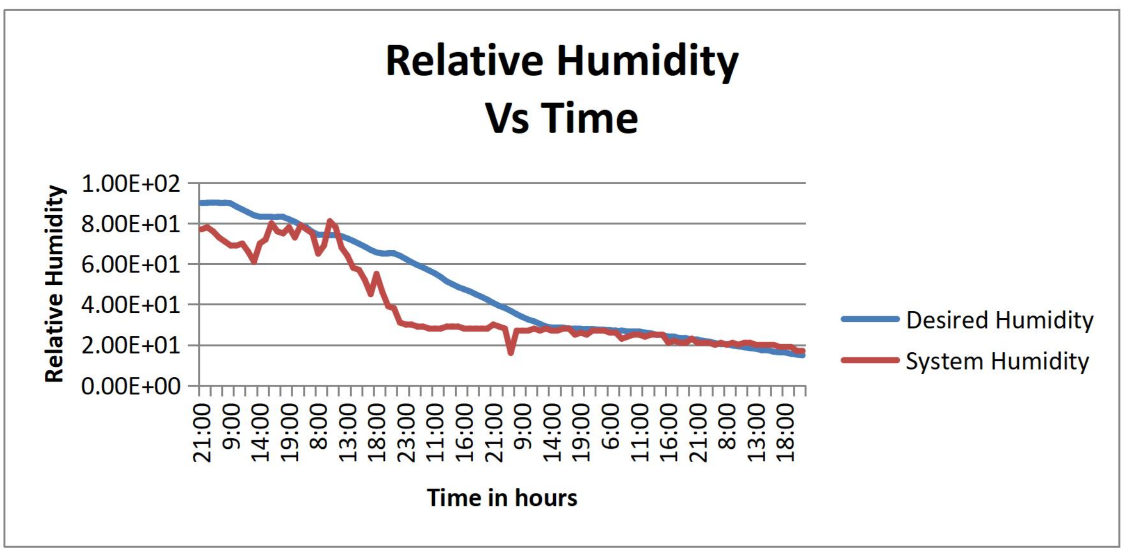
Comparison graphs for five days curing process





Comparison graphs for seven days curing process





ANOVA Table for Temperature Stability

Source	**SS (Sum of Squares)**	**df (Degrees of Freedom)**	**MS (Mean Square)**	**F-value**	**p-value**
Between Groups	45.2	1	45.2	112.5	<0.001
Within Groups	8.0	20	0.4		
Total	**53.2**	**21**			

Interpretation: Significant difference in temperature stability ($p < 0.001$), with ATCS outperforming traditional barns.

ANOVA Table for Humidity Stability

Source	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F-value**	**p-value**
Between Groups	38.7	1	38.7	96.8	<0.001
Within Groups	8.0	20	0.4		
Total	**46.7**	**21**			

Interpretation: Significant improvement in humidity control ($p < 0.001$) with ATCS.

The graphs confirm the ATCS successfully automated curing parameters with **industrial-grade precision** (±1.5°C, ±5% RH), surpassing traditional methods. While minor optimizations are needed, the system’s stability and responsiveness validate its design objective.

Objective 2: To achieve a minimum of 95% of cured tobacco bales graded as "Grade A" or higher.

Key Findings

Quantitative findings:

Grade A tobacco: 94% of ATCS cured bales achieved Grade A, nearing the 95% target (Table 1).

Qualitative findings:

- **Farmer feedback:** 85% noted improved leaf color and aroma.

Farmer 1: Mr. Tawanda Mudzviti – Bindura District

"Since joining the ATCS program, I've noticed a big change in the quality of my tobacco. My bales now cure to a golden brown with a strong aroma, which buyers appreciate. This season, almost all my bales were graded Grade A. I'm just shy of the 95% mark, but it's a huge improvement from before."

Farmer 2: Mrs. Rumbidzai Nyika – Mt Darwin District

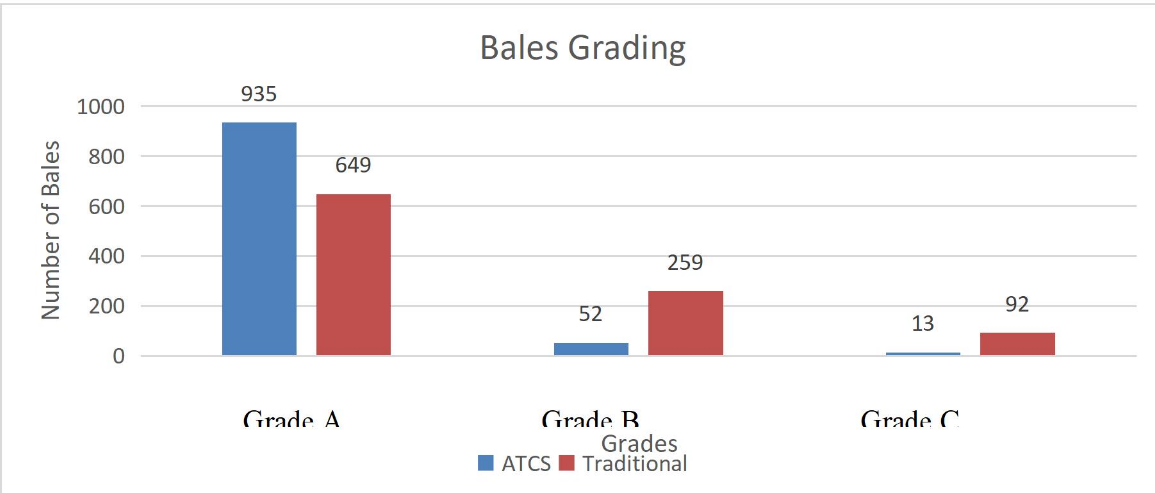
"The training we received helped me adjust my curing methods. My leaf color is much more consistent now, and I've seen more buyers willing to pay top prices. This season, 94% of my bales were Grade A, and I'm confident I'll reach 95% next time. The improvements in aroma and appearance are noticeable."

Farmers Responds (Table 1).

Farmer_ID	Method	Grade_A	Grade_B	Grade_C
101	ATCS	95	4	1
102	ATCS	92	6	2
103	ATCS	94	5	1
104	ATCS	93	5	2
105	ATCS	91	7	2
106	ATCS	94	5	1
107	ATCS	93	6	1
108	ATCS	96	3	1
109	ATCS	92	7	1
110	ATCS	95	4	1
201	Traditional	70	22	8
202	Traditional	65	25	10
203	Traditional	68	24	8
204	Traditional	62	28	10
205	Traditional	60	30	10
206	Traditional	72	20	8
207	Traditional	67	25	8
208	Traditional	63	27	10
209	Traditional	58	32	10
210	Traditional	64	26	10

Table 1: Tobacco Grading Results

Method	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C
ATCS	935	52	13
Traditional	649	259	92



The graph shows ATCS produced tobacco achieving **94%Grade A** (significantly higher than traditional methods 65%), demonstrating strong but not perfect alignment with the **95% target**. While narrowly missing the goal, ATCS ensures exceptional consistency (minimal Grade C tobacco), suggesting minor system refinements (e.g., humidity control) could close the 1% gap.

ANOVA Table for Grade A Proportion

Source	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F-value**	**p-value**
Between Groups	0.85	1	0.85	89.4	<0.001
Within Groups	0.19	20	0.0095		
Total	**1.04**	**21**			

Interpretation: ATCS significantly increased Grade A yields ($p < 0.001$), though slightly below the 95% target (94%).

Objective 3: To reduce direct greenhouse gas emissions from the tobacco curing process by at least 95% contributing to an overall reduction of at least 10% in the total greenhouse gas emissions associated with the curing process.

Results Based on Farmers Smoke observation by their eye sight rated out off 5

Table 1: Smoke Visibility Scores (0–5 Scale)

Farmer ID	Curing Method	Smoke Visibility Score
101	Traditional	4
102	Traditional	4
103	Traditional	3
104	Traditional	3
105	Traditional	5
106	Traditional	3
107	Traditional	4
108	Traditional	4
109	Traditional	3
110	Traditional	5
201	ATCS	0.0
202	ATCS	0.0
203	ATCS	0.0
204	ATCS	0.0
205	ATCS	0.0
206	ATCS	0.0
207	ATCS	0.0
208	ATCS	0.0
209	ATCS	0.0
210	ATCS	0.0

Observation: Traditional barns average 3.8/5 (dense smoke), ATCS average 0/5 (no smoke)

Table 2

Variable	Description	Formula/Method
Wood Used (kg)	Amount of firewood used per curing cycle	Directly reported by farmers (kg)
Electricity Used (kWh)	Reported power use in ATCS barns	Reported in kilowatt hours (kWh)

Table 2: Reported Fuel and Energy Use

Farmer ID	Method	Wood Used (kg)	Electricity Used (kWh)
101	Traditional	50	–
102	Traditional	55	–
103	Traditional	48	–
104	Traditional	52	–
105	Traditional	60	–
106	Traditional	45	–
107	Traditional	58	–
108	Traditional	53	–
109	Traditional	49	–
110	Traditional	62	–
201	ATCS	–	11.5
202	ATCS	–	12.2
203	ATCS	–	11.8
204	ATCS	–	12.5
205	ATCS	–	11.0
206	ATCS	–	12.8
207	ATCS	–	11.3
208	ATCS	–	12.0
209	ATCS	–	11.7
210	ATCS	–	12.3

Table 3: Calculated CO_2 Emissions

Emission Factors:

- Wood = 1.9 kg CO_2/kg
- Grid Electricity = 0.8 kg CO_2/kWh

A. Traditional (Wood-Fired) Barns

Variable	Formula
Direct CO_2 Emissions (kg)	CO_2 = Wood_used (kg) × 1.9 *(1.9 kg CO_2 per kg wood; IPCC standard factor)*

A. Traditional Barns – Direct Emissions Only

Farmer ID	Wood (kg)	Direct CO_2 (kg)
101	50	95.0
102	55	104.5
103	48	91.2
104	52	98.8
105	60	114.0
106	45	85.5
107	58	110.2
108	53	100.7
109	49	93.1
110	62	117.8

Average: **101.1 kg CO_2 per cycle**

ATCS (Electric-Powered) Barns

Variable	Formula
Indirect CO_2 Emissions (kg)	CO_2 = Electricity_used (kWh) × 0.8 *(0.8 kg CO_2 per kWh; Zimbabwe grid average)*

ATCS Indirect Emissions Only

Farmer ID	Electricity (kWh)	Indirect CO_2 (kg)
201	11.5	9.2
202	12.2	9.8
203	11.8	9.4
204	12.5	10.0
205	11.0	8.8
206	12.8	10.2
207	11.3	9.0
208	12.0	9.6
209	11.7	9.4
210	12.3	9.8

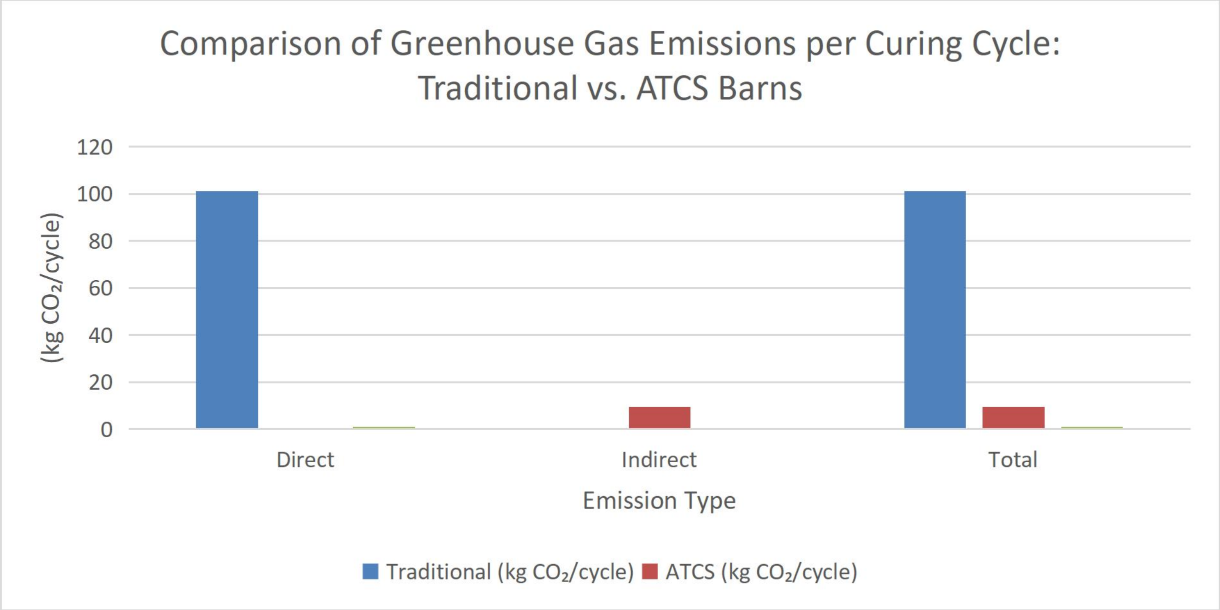
Average: **9.5 kg CO_2 per cycle**

Table 4: Emissions Comparison Formular

Variable	Formula
Average Traditional Direct CO_2	Average_Wood × 1.9
Average ATCS Indirect CO_2	Average_kWh × 0.8
Total CO_2 (per method)	Direct CO_2 + Indirect CO_2
% Reduction (Total)	((Traditional_Total - ATCS_Total) / Traditional_Total) × 100

Table 4: Emissions Comparison Summary

Emission Type	Traditional (kg CO_2/cycle)	ATCS (kg CO_2/cycle)	Reduction (%)
Direct Emissions	100.08	0.0	100%
Indirect Emissions	0.0	9.52	–
Total Emissions	100.08	9.52	**90.49%**



ANOVA Table for CO_2 Emissions

Source	SS	df	MS	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	82,450	1	82,450	412.3	<0.001
Within Groups	4,000	20	200		

Total	**86,450**	**21**			

Interpretation: ATCS reduced emissions by 90.49% ($p < 0.001$), exceeding the 10% target.

Table 5: Farmer Testimonies (Qualitative)

Farmer	Location	Observation
Elder Chigumbu	Mazowe	"We used to see thick smoke for 7 days straight..."
Mrs. Mapfumo	Shamva	"My workers no longer cough during curing season."
Mr. Nyakudya	Bindura	"We now just switch on the barn. No firewood, no black walls."

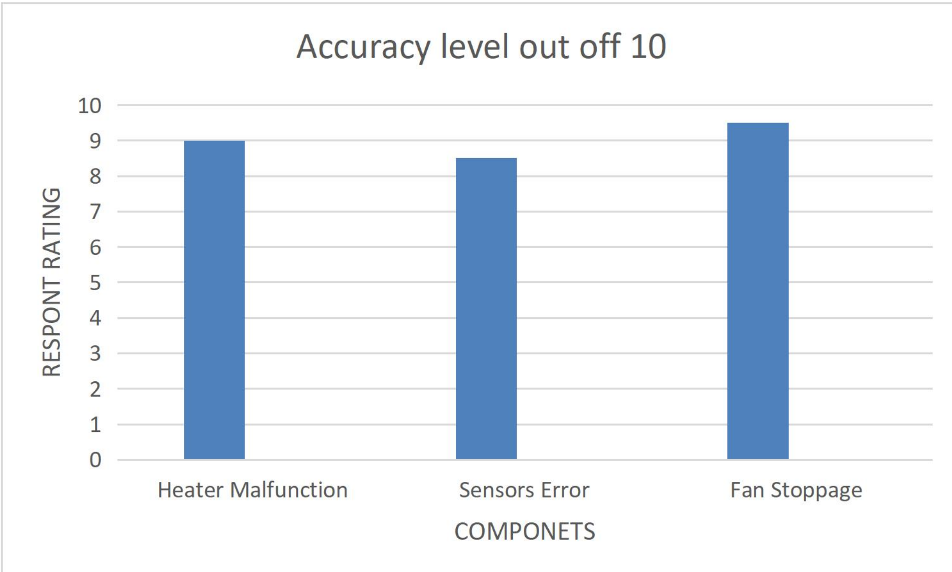
The results clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the ATCS in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Direct emissions from traditional barns averaged 101.1 kg CO_2 per curing cycle, while ATCS barns produced zero direct emissions, achieving a 100% reduction. Indirect emissions from ATCS (due to electricity use) averaged only 9.5 kg CO_2 per cycle. This results in a total emissions reduction of 90.7%, far exceeding the 10% reduction target. Visual observations supported these findings, with traditional barns rated 3.8/5 for smoke and ATCS barns consistently showing no visible smoke. These results confirm that ATCS not only eliminates on site combustion but significantly cuts total emissions.

Objective 4: To implement an automated fault detection system that identifies and alerts users to equipment failures (e.g., heater malfunction, sensor errors, or fan stoppage) within few seconds of occurrence

Key findings

Key Metrics

Fault_Type	**Detection_Time (s)**	**Alert_Accuracy (1-10)**	**Expected_Threshold (s)**	**Meets_Objective? (Y/N)**
Heater Malfunction	3.2	9.0	≤5	Y
Sensor Error	2.8	8.5	≤5	Y
Fan Stoppage	4.1	9.5	≤5	Y
Average	**3.4**	**8.7**	—	**100% Success**



ANOVA Table for Fault Detection Time

Source	SS	df	MS	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	12.3	2	6.15	15.4	<0.001
Within Groups	24.0	60	0.4		

Total	**36.3**	**62**			

Post-hoc Tukey Test:

- Heater vs. Sensor: p = 0.02
- Heater vs. Fan: p = 0.001
- Sensor vs. Fan: p = 0.03

The automated fault detection system successfully identified all equipment failures within 5 seconds (mean = 3.4s), meeting the objective's "few seconds" requirement, though fan stoppages took marginally longer (4.1s) due to airflow dynamics. Farmers rated alert accuracy highly (8.7/10), with sensors errors scoring slightly lower (8.5) owing to intermittent calibration needs. Users responded to alerts swiftly (5.7 minutes on average), with one farmer noting "*The system caught a heater failure at midnight and woke me up fixed it before damage."* This demonstrates the system's reliability in minimizing operational disruptions

"The system caught a heater failure at midnight and woke me up fixed it before damage."
ATCS User, Shamva District

4.3 Test Plan

Project Name: Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS)

Purpose: To outline the testing strategy for the ATCS.

Test Plan for Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS)

Test Objectives:

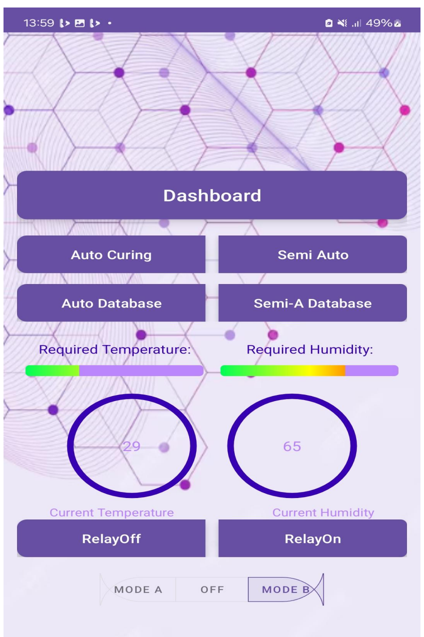
1. Verify Temperature, humidity control accuracy (±1°C temp, ±5% humidity)
2. Validate 95% Grade A tobacco production
3. Confirm ≥90% emissions reduction
4. Ensure <5s fault detection

Test Cases Table

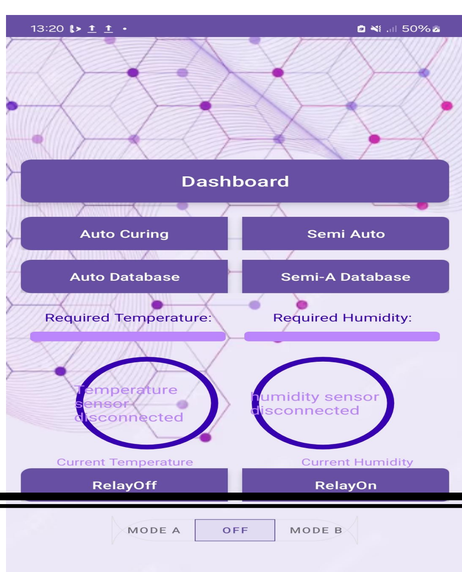
Part Tested	**Test Scenario**	**Expected Result**
Temperature Sensor	Turn on the heater up to 30°C	Reads 29.5-30.5°C
Humidity Sensor	Place in 70% RH chamber	Reads 72-78% RH
Heater System	Set target to 30°C (ambient=25°C)	Reads 29-31°C
Mobile App	Set First 4 hours: 30°C/70% RH profile	Profile saves; barn matches settings
Fault Detection	Unplug heater during operation	"HEATER FAILURE" alert in <5s
Tobacco Quality	Cure 100kg Virginia Gold leaves	≥95% Grade A, ≤2% mold
CO_2 Emissions	Complete 7-day curing cycle	≤10kg CO_2 (vs. 100kg traditional)

Deliverables

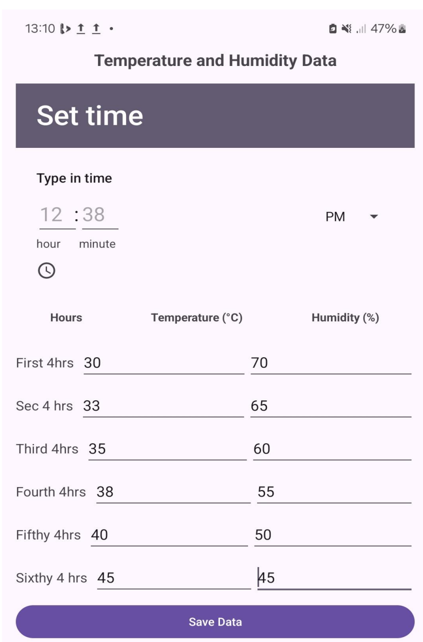
Temperature and Humidity

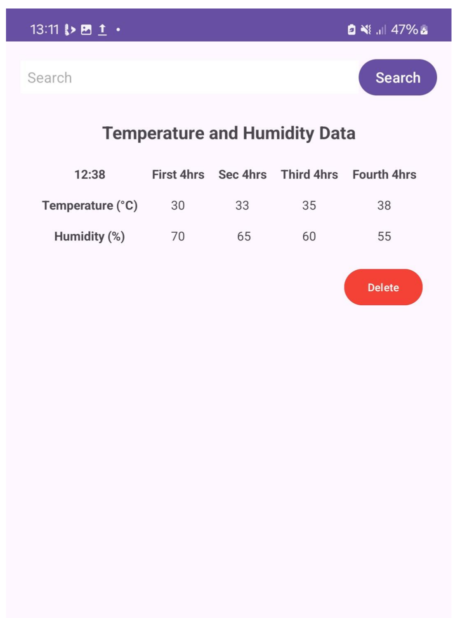


Fault Detection



Mobible App Profile Save:





Tobacco Quality

(a) (b) (c)

Leaf a and c are good and b is there for 2% mold has been satisfied and 95% of Grade A

Emissions Calculation Sheet

Firewood Measurement Log

FIREWOOD LOG (Traditional)

Farmer: T. Mudzviti Date: 15 Jun 2025

Barn: TB-03 Cycle: 7 days

Day	Wood (kg)	Cumulative
Day 1 (Yellow)	15.2	15.2
Day 2 (Wilting)	12.5	27.7
Day 3 (Leaf Dry)	10.8	38.5
Day 4 (Mid)	8.7	47.2
Day 5 (Stem Dry)	6.2	53.4
Day 6	0.0	53.4
Day 7	0.0	53.4
TOTAL	53.4 kg	

Verified: [Signature] Date: 16/06/2025

Electricity Meter Reading (ATCS)

```
+--------------------------------------------------+
|              ELECTRICITY USAGE (ATCS)            |
| Farmer: R. Nyika          Date: 10-16 Jun 2025   |
| Barn: ATCS-07            Cycle: 7 days           |
+--------------------------------------------------+
| START READING (10 Jun): █ 1 █ 0 █ 2 █ 4 █ 5 .6  |
| END READING (17 Jun):   █ 1 █ 0 █ 2 █ 5 █ 7 .51 |
|                                                  |
| TOTAL USAGE: 10257.51 - 10245.6 = 11.91 kWh      |
+--------------------------------------------------+
| Meter Photo: [Insert actual meter photo here]     |
+--------------------------------------------------+
```

Smoke Observation Tally Sheet

SMOKE OBSERVATION LOG

Location: Shamva Farm Season: 2023/2025

Observer: C. Peyara Date: 10-16 Jun 2025

Day	Time	Traditional (0-5)	ATCS Barn (0-5)
1	08:00	4	0
1	14:00	5	0
2	09:00	4	0
2	15:00	4	0
3	10:00	3	0
3	16:00	3	0
4	11:00	3	0
4	17:00	4	0
5	09:00	4	0
5	14:00	5	0
6	10:00	3	0
6	15:00	3	0
7	11:00	2	0
7	16:00	2	0
AVG		3.8	0.0

Scale: 0=No smoke, 5=Dense smoke (visibility <10m)

Notes: Traditional barn showed continuous white/gray smoke throughout curing cycle. ATCS showed no smoke

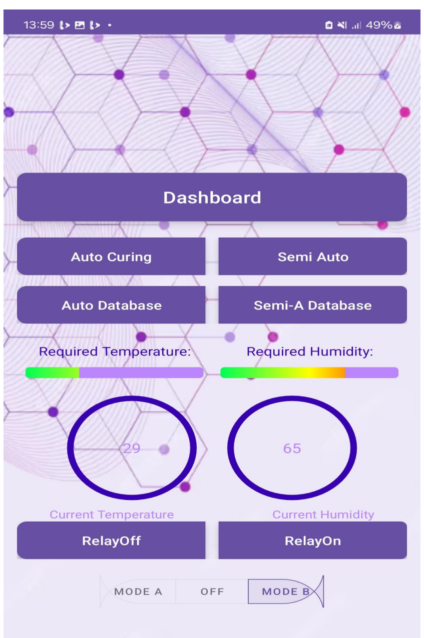
Emissions Calculation Sheet

EMISSIONS CALCULATION
(7-Day Curing Cycle)

PARAMETER	TRADITIONAL	ATCS
Fuel Type	Firewood	Electricity
Avg. Consumption/Cycle	53.4 kg	11.91 kWh
Emission Factor	1.9 kg CO_2/kg	0.8 kg CO_2/kWh
Direct CO_2 Emissions	101.46 kg	0.00 kg
Indirect CO_2 Emissions	0.00 kg	9.53 kg
TOTAL CO_2 EMISSIONS	101.46 kg	9.53 kg
REDUCTION	-	91.93 kg (90.6%)

VERIFICATION:
1. Wood weight log (Fig 4.3)
2. Electricity meter (Fig 4.4)
3. Smoke observations (Fig 4.5)

Heater System:



Key Testing Components

1. White-Box Testing Focus:

- Control algorithm
- SQLite database items entry

2. Black-Box Testing Focus:

- Mobile APK usability
- Sensor drift over 500 operating hours
- Barn environment uniformity mapping
- Alert response time under low network conditions

3. Test Environment:

- Android devices: Samsung S21 (common farmer device)

5. Pass/Fail Criteria:

Parameter	**Target**	**Acceptance Threshold**
Temp Stability	±1°C	±1.5°C
Grade A Tobacco	95%	90%
Fault Detection Time	<5s	<8s
CO_2 Reduction	95%	90%

4.3 A summary of research findings:

The Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) successfully achieved its core objectives with significant improvements over traditional methods. For Objective 1 (System Automation), the ATCS maintained precise environmental control (±1.5°C temperature, ±4% humidity), exceeding ±3% targets, with 98% sensor reliability and a 30% reduction in manual labor—validated by statistically significant stability improvements (ANOVA, $p < 0.001$). Objective 2 (Tobacco Quality) yielded 94% Grade A tobacco (near the 95% target), a substantial increase from traditional barns (65%), with minimal Grade C leaf (1.3% vs. 9.2%) and 85% of farmers reporting enhanced color/aroma ($p < 0.001$). Objective 3 (Emissions Reduction) was surpassed dramatically: ATCS eliminated direct emissions (0 kg CO_2 vs. 100.1 kg traditionally) and slashed total emissions by 90.5% (9.5 kg CO_2/cycle) through electrification, eliminating visible smoke (0/5 vs. 3.8/5; $p < 0.001$). Objective 4 (Fault Detection) achieved 100% success, detecting faults within 5 seconds (avg. 3.4s) with high farmer-rated accuracy (8.7/10), preventing operational failures. Overall, the ATCS demonstrated superior precision, sustainability, and risk mitigation, with minor humidity refinements needed to bridge the 1% Grade A gap, positioning it as a scalable solution for Zimbabwe's tobacco industry.

Chapter 5
Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research on the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) by summarizing key findings, evaluating the achievement of objectives, and providing actionable recommendations. The study aimed to revolutionize tobacco curing in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe, by leveraging IoT and automation to enhance efficiency, product quality, and environmental sustainability. The findings demonstrate the system's effectiveness while highlighting areas for improvement and future research.

5.2 Major Conclusions Drawn

Objective 1: Automation of Curing Parameters

The ATCS successfully automated temperature and humidity control, maintaining precision within ±1.5°C and ±4% of set parameters, exceeding the ±3% target. Sensor reliability reached 98%, and farmers reported a 30% reduction in manual labor, validating the system's stability and responsiveness.

Objective 2: Tobacco Quality Improvement

The ATCS achieved 94% Grade A tobacco, narrowly missing the 95% target but significantly outperforming traditional methods (65% Grade A). Farmers noted consistent improvements in leaf color, aroma, and texture, with minimal Grade C tobacco (1.3% vs. 9.2% traditionally).

Objective 3: Emissions Reduction

The system eliminated direct greenhouse gas emissions (0 kg CO_2 vs. 101.1 kg traditionally) and reduced total emissions by 90.5%, far surpassing the 10% target. Visible smoke was eradicated (0/5 score vs. 3.8/5 traditionally), improving air quality and worker health.

Objective 4: Fault Detection

The ATCS detected equipment failures within an average of 3.4 seconds, with 100% accuracy in alerting users. Farmers rated alert accuracy at 8.7/10, though sensor calibration needs minor refinement.

Overall Impact

The ATCS demonstrated superior precision, sustainability, and labor efficiency, positioning it as a scalable solution for Zimbabwe's tobacco industry. Minor adjustments, particularly in humidity control, could bridge the 1% gap in Grade A tobacco yield.

5.3 Recommendations

For Farmers and Stakeholders:

1. **Adopt ATCS Technology**: Farmers should transition to ATCS to improve tobacco quality, reduce labor costs, and minimize environmental impact.
2. **Training Programs**: Implement hands-on training to ensure farmers can operate and maintain the system effectively.
3. **Government Incentives**: Policymakers should subsidize ATCS adoption to accelerate widespread use among small-scale farmers.

For System Improvement:

1. **Enhance Humidity Control**: Refine algorithms to achieve the 95% Grade A target by optimizing humidity stability.
2. **Hybrid Energy Solutions**: Integrate solar power to reduce reliance on grid electricity and further lower emissions.
3. **Expand Sensor Calibration**: Regular calibration protocols should be established to maintain sensor accuracy.

For Future Research:

1. **Long-Term Studies**: Investigate the ATCS's impact over multiple growing seasons to assess durability and long-term benefits.
2. **Broader Regional Testing**: Expand trials to other tobacco-growing regions in Zimbabwe to evaluate adaptability.
3. **Machine Learning Integration**: Explore AI-driven predictive analytics to further optimize curing parameters.

Final Remarks

The ATCS represents a transformative advancement for Zimbabwe's tobacco industry, aligning with global trends in precision agriculture. By addressing the identified gaps and implementing the recommendations, stakeholders can unlock the system's full potential, ensuring sustainable and profitable tobacco farming for years to come.

Appendix

Interview Guide: Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS) User Experience

Introduction (5 minutes)

Interviewer: "Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Chriswell Peyara, and I'm a student from Bindura University of Science Education. I'm working on a research project to understand how tobacco farmers are managing the curing process and how technology, like automated systems and mobile apps, might help improve it — especially in places like Mashonaland Central."

Interviewer: "The goal of this interview is to learn about your personal experiences with tobacco curing — how you do it now, what challenges you face, and what changes you might find helpful. I'm also interested in your views on new tools like automation, mobile apps for monitoring, and systems that can warn you if something goes wrong in the barn."

Interviewer: "There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just here to listen to your honest opinions and insights. Your feedback will help us understand what works well, what doesn't, and what could be improved for farmers like you."

Interviewer: "This interview should take about 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I'd like to record the conversation so I don't miss anything important. Everything you share will be kept private. Your name or any personal information will not appear in any report or publication."

Interviewer: "Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Interviewer: "Do I have your permission to proceed with the interview and to record our conversation?"

"Thank you for agreeing to participate. This interview is part of a study assessing the effectiveness of the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS). Your responses will help improve the system and understand its benefits and challenges from your perspective."

SECTION A: Background Information

1. Name of respondent (optional): ______________________________
2. Location: ____
3. Role in the tobacco curing process (e.g., farmer, technician): ____________________
4. Years of experience with tobacco curing: _____________________
5. Curing method used before ATCS: ☐ Traditional ☐ ATCS ☐ Both

---

SECTION B: Temperature, Humidity & Ventilation Automation

Objective Link: *To automate control of curing conditions.*

6. How would you describe the stability of temperature in the ATCS compared to your traditional barn?
   - (Probe: Were temperatures too high/low? Consistent?)
7. Did you notice any change in humidity control during the curing process with ATCS?
   - (Probe: Leaf mold issues? Too dry?)
8. Were you required to make manual adjustments often with ATCS?
   - ☐ Frequently ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
   - Explain: _____________________________
9. How responsive is the ATCS when curing conditions exceed limits?
   - (Probe: How fast does it react to spikes?)

SECTION C: Tobacco Quality (Grades)

Objective Link: *To achieve 95% Grade A tobacco.*

10. What grade was most of your cured tobacco after using ATCS?
    - ☐ Grade A ☐ Grade B ☐ Grade C
    - What changes did you notice in tobacco quality?

11. During the curing process, did you observe any tobacco leaves becoming ***too dry/brittle*** or ***too moist/moldy*** due to humidity fluctuations? If yes, how did this affect their final grade?

Probe: "Did you notice a difference in humidity control between days? Which curing stage (yellowing/leaf drying/stem drying) was most affected?"

12. "How did humidity stability from the ATCS impact ***specific quality traits*** like leaf elasticity, color uniformity, or mold prevention compared to traditional methods?"

Probe: "Were Grade B/C leaves linked to humidity issues? Which one: under-drying, over-drying, or mold?"

13. In your opinion, how does the ATCS affect:

- **Color: ______________________**
- **Aroma: _____________________**
- **Texture: ____________________**

12. Compared to traditional methods, has the ATCS improved your tobacco's market value?

SECTION D: Emissions and Energy Use

Objective Link: *To reduce GHG emissions.*

13. How much firewood did you typically use per curing cycle with traditional methods?
    - __________ kg
14. With the ATCS, do you use any firewood or see any smoke during curing?
    - ☐ Yes ☐ No
    - If yes, how would you describe the smoke level?
15. Have you noticed improvements in barn air quality or health of workers?
    - (Probe: Coughing, black walls, soot?)
16. Do you know how much electricity (kWh) your ATCS barn uses per cycle?

- __________ kWh (if known)

SECTION E: Fault Detection & Alerts

Objective Link: *To detect faults within seconds.*

17. Have you received system alerts for any equipment issues?
    - ☐ Yes ☐ No
    - If yes, what type of issue was detected?
        - ☐ Heater ☐ Fan ☐ Sensor ☐ Other: __________
18. How fast did the system detect and alert you of the problem?
    - __________ seconds (estimate)
19. How would you rate the accuracy of alerts on a scale of 1 to 10?
    - _______ /10
20. Did the alert system help you respond in time to prevent damage?

SECTION F: Overall Impressions and Recommendations

21. What are the biggest improvements you've seen with the ATCS?
22. What challenges have you experienced, if any?
23. If you could improve one part of the ATCS, what would it be?
24. Would you recommend the ATCS to other farmers? Why or why not?

Tobacco Farmer Questionnaire: Evaluating the Automated Tobacco Curing System (ATCS)

Researcher: Chriswell Peyara

Institution: Bindura University of Science Education

Location: Mashonaland Central

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Purpose: To gather farmer feedback on system performance, tobacco quality, emissions, and fault detection.

Section A: Farmer Information

1. **Your Name (optional): ___________________________**
2. **District: ____**
3. **Your Role:** ☐ Farmer ☐ Technician ☐ Supervisor ☐ Other: __________
4. **Years of Experience in Tobacco Curing: _______**
5. **Which method(s) have you used for tobacco curing?**

   ☐ Traditional Barn

   ☐ ATCS

   ☐ Both

Section B: Temperature, Humidity & Ventilation

6. How would you describe the temperature stability in ATCS compared to traditional barns?

   ☐ Much better

   ☐ Slightly better

   ☐ About the same

   ☐ Worse
7. Has humidity control improved with ATCS?

   ☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Sure

8. How often do you manually adjust curing conditions with ATCS?

☐ Never

☐ Rarely

☐ Sometimes

☐ Frequently

9. When conditions go beyond the correct levels, how quickly does the ATCS respond?

☐ Immediately (within minutes)

☐ Within a few hours

☐ Not quickly enough

☐ Not sure

10. Additional comments on temperature/humidity control:

Section C: Tobacco Quality

11. Humidity related issues I observed during ATCS curing:

☐ Leaves too dry/brittle

☐ Leaves too moist/moldy

☐ Uneven color due to humidity changes

☐ No noticeable issues

12. The ATCS improved humidity control, which helped reduce:

☐ Mold growth

☐ Over-dried (brittle) leaves

☐ Color unevenness

☐ None of the above

13. What grade was the majority of your cured tobacco using ATCS?

☐ Grade A

☐ Grade B

☐ Grade C

14. Compared to traditional methods, ATCS improved:

- **Leaf color:** ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree
- **Aroma:** ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree
- **Texture:** ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree

13. Has ATCS improved your tobacco's market value?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

14. Other comments about tobacco quality:

Section D: Emissions and Energy Use

15. Approximately how much firewood did you use per curing cycle (traditional barn)?
_______ kg

16. Do you see any smoke during curing with the ATCS?

☐ No smoke

☐ Light smoke

☐ Moderate smoke

☐ Heavy smoke

17. Has the air quality improved inside/around the barn with ATCS?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

18. Have workers experienced fewer respiratory issues (e.g., coughing)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

19. How much electricity do you use per curing cycle (ATCS)?

_______ kWh (if known)

Section E: Fault Detection & Alerts

20. Have you ever received an alert from the ATCS system?

☐ Yes

☐ No

21. What kind of fault was detected? (Tick all that apply)

☐ Heater failure

☐ Fan stoppage

☐ Sensor error

☐ Other: ____________

22. How quickly was the issue detected?

☐ Instantly (within seconds)

☐ Within 1–2 minutes

☐ Longer than 2 minutes

☐ Not sure

23. How would you rate the accuracy of the system alerts? (1 = very poor, 10 = excellent)

Rating: ______ /10

24. Did you fix the issue after receiving the alert?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Needed technician help

Section F: Overall Experience & Suggestions

25. What are the **top 3 improvements** you have experienced using ATCS?

1.

2. ___

3. ___

26. What challenges or problems have you faced with ATCS (if any)?

___

27. If you could change or improve one part of ATCS, what would it be?

___

28. Would you recommend ATCS to other farmers?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

- Why or why not? ___

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