CURING AND MARKETING SEED CORN

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One of the most essential factors influencing the yield of corn is the curing of the seed. This is such a simple operation that no farmer can afford to neglect it. Our fathers and grandfathers used to hang their seed corn on the south side of a building, on the windmill frame, or even on the clothes line so that the sun could bake and bleach it until it was dry. And they tell us they never had any trouble about poor stands in their corn field. No doubt they had a fairly good stand from year to year, because they raised only a scrubby shallow-kerneled, low-yielding flint corn which matured early and dried out quickly before cold weather set in.

But during the last ten or twelve years tremendous improvements have been made in the quality and yield of corn through selection and breeding and the introduction of the dent varieties. These larger types require a longer time before maturing and more careful methods in curing of the seed. In fact, these improvements have brought about a condition which makes the curing of seed corn by artificial heat in our Wisconsin climate a necessity. Yet we find any number of farmers who today follow these old methods of curing their seed corn and as a result they secure poor stands and low yields.

The curing of our seed corn should begin in the field before the corn is picked. If the corn is allowed to mature thoroughly before picking the seed, it will contain less moisture and hence greatly help in the curing. Furthermore mature seed corn will have more vitality and weight than corn that is picked early. For this reason we would rather run chances with a light frost—which by the way does no damage to the vitality of the seed—then to pick it early and get weak seed and a great shrinkage.

As soon as the seed is picked it should be put in the room or place where it is to be cured. Now, as I have already mentioned, the successful seed man of today no longer recommends the sun-drying of the seed corn. Direct sunlight has an injurious effect on the germination of the seed corn, and it also bleaches the color so that it will not be
The "good, old fashioned way" of curing seed corn on the south side of the barn.

Seed curing house of A. L. Thompson, Blair. Experience has convinced corn growers of the great value of carefully cured seed.
true to type; but he cures his seed in a well-ventilated place where some artificial heat can be had.

On our Wisconsin farms there are no better places than the kitchen, attic or the furnace room for curing of small amounts. There are a number of simple devices which are all good for holding the corn. One simple and practical method is by using double strands of binder twine lacing the ears securely. The one objection to this method is that it takes two men to do the job. A simpler method is to begin at the top where the twine is suspended and gradually work downward giving one turn of the twine and a twist of the ear until you get to the end of the string and then tie the last ear. If the twine is turned about the ear nearer the butt end, the string will not unwind and cause the corn to fall down. This has some advantages over the first method mentioned in that it takes only one man to do the work and it does not fall down again if disturbed. It is convenient because after the corn is taken down the string can be rolled up ready for the next season. And besides it requires much less twine than the double strand method.

Another device known as the “corn tree” is a very simple method. This can be made by driving finishing nails at proper spaces apart on all four sides of a two-by-four. The ears can be easily pushed on to these nails before the corn has dried.

The best device is undoubtedly the wire hangers. These can be made very cheaply from the electric welded woven fencing. By clipping the cross wires on each side of the horizontal wire, hangers of any desired lengths can be made. By bending the end of the horizontal strand it can be suspended from nails or wires on the rafters. Patent hangers similar to these are now on the market for a reasonable price.

It does not matter which of these devices you use but the two important factors to remember is steady moderate heat and ventilation. Free circulation of air is just as important as heat; because if the moist air is not removed by air circulation molds will develop and kill the germination power of the seed.

So then, the kitchen, attic or the furnace room are ideal places in which to cure enough seed corn for your own individual use. But if a large quantity of seed corn is to be cured by artificial heat, a “kiln house” is advisable. In
erecting or remodeling a building for such a purpose, three things should be remembered—ventilation, cheap heat, and convenience in hanging or handling the corn. The building should be provided with ventilating doors on all sides, which can be opened to allow a free circulation of air on warm dry days. The heating apparatus should be located under the corn so that an upward current of air is formed. This will expel the moisture in a very short time and greatly reduce the cost of heating. Too high a temperature is harmful to the corn, but a slow steady heat gives the best results. In our seed house we usually start the stove as soon as all the corn is hung and keep it up for three or four weeks, when it usually is thoroughly dried out and ready to pack. You can very readily tell when corn is dry by giving the ear a twist; if it does not give but feels as rigid and hard as bone, it is dry and contains less than ten per cent moisture. Corn in this condition will not be injured by low temperature if it is kept in a dry place where no air circulates.

Now in regard to conveniences in placing the seed in the houses for drying. Many people prefer to pile their corn on slats or wire floors above the heat. This certainly saves a lot of time and labor at the time of selecting, but unless the circulation is exceedingly good some of the corn is apt to mold; and if mice should get in, which they sometimes do, they will have a splendid nesting and breeding place in that heap of corn. Others use the rack system which is good but requires so much room. In our seed house we use the wire hangers which we made ourselves from the electric welded fencing. Although this is slower than these other methods mentioned we like them because a boy can easily place the ears on them and hang them up. They are convenient because they enable us to hang a large quantity of corn in a small space and yet secure free circulation around each ear. And when the corn is taken down they can be placed in a corner out of your way for packing and storing. So much for the curing of the corn for seed. Remember fire-drying of seed corn is so simple and cheap and always insures you a high germinating test—for these reasons you should not neglect it with your own seed nor to buy seed that has not been cured in that way.

Now just a word about marketing seed corn and I’ll be through. If you can produce the “goods” you can always
find a market for it. And so it is with seed corn. Good Wisconsin seed corn has always been in demand and prospects are bright for it to continue to be in demand in the future.

The best medium of advertising that you can get is to be on the seed growers' list of our association. Have your seed inspected and if it gets by Mr. Garland or the other inspectors it is good enough for anybody. I cannot quote from experience in advertising through farm papers but I believe these mediums of advertising are very good. A simple way to sell your seed is to work up a home trade. That's what we have been trying to do the past two years and conditions peculiar to our vicinity have greatly helped us in this. Within the last three or four years the farmers in our vicinity have nearly all built silos and what little corn they raise goes mostly in the silo. Now silo filling and seed corn picking come at the same time and as a result most farmers are too busy to pick their own seed corn. For that reason they find it just as convenient to depend on some one else for their seed. The seed houses have been getting some of the trade, of course. At present we have the only seed corn curing house in our vicinity, and as I have already mentioned we have many customers who order their seed before the corn is picked. We have grown some corn for the seed houses but find now that the local demand will take care of all we can raise. It is more profitable to grow a smaller amount of extra choice seed than to pick a large amount of inferior ears. The higher price and better satisfied customers more than make up for the smaller amount. Never send out a bushel of seed unless you can guarantee a high germinating test. I know there are farmers throughout the state who disregard the State Seed Inspection Law which requires every farmer who sells seed to have a sample of that seed tested and examined by the State Seed Inspector before he can sell it, and it must have a tag bearing the test and purity as found by the State Inspector before it can be delivered. I have never as yet found a member of our association doing that but we have a right to demand it of others in order to protect ourselves.

In conclusion, therefore, let me say that if you select the very best of your corn for seed and fire dry it, you will be able to guarantee a high germination test, and you will always find a good demand for it.
Another old time favorite. Drying seed corn on the wind mill.

HOW CURING AFFECTS THE STAND

The seed was cured in three ways, in a furnace room, a tool shed, and on the south side of a barn. The difference in the stand would more than pay for the extra work.