



Photo by J. Howard

Corn smut for dinner? You bet, says Christina Arnold, who contracts with sweet corn growers and sells smut as a new gourmet delicacy to Mexican restaurants.

RESTAURANTS CHARGE \$15 OR MORE FOR A SERVING OF THIS "FARM FUNGUS FEAST"

Sweet Corn Smut: A New Gourmet Delicacy

You probably thought corn smut wasn't good for much of anything but a New York company says it's a real gourmet delicacy that sells for \$15 or more per serving in restaurants.

Christina Arnold's company, El Avionado, Ltd., provides smut from sweet corn to restaurants specializing in authentic Mexican cuisine. She pays farmers \$1 to \$2 a pound (about 50 cents an ear) for the swollen silvery globules which she says make a great "farm fungus feast".

"Corn smut has been enjoyed for centuries in Central and South America," says Arnold, whose mother was born in Mexico. "It's a high-priced delicacy in many countries but it's always been regarded as poisonous in the U.S. simply because of the way it looks."

The USDA doesn't allow fresh corn smut to be imported from Mexico so Arnold contracts with U.S. growers. In 1988 she bought only about 50 lbs. of smut but last year increased the amount to 3,000 lbs. - mostly from farmers in New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. She says she could have sold much more if there had been a greater supply.

According to Arnold, corn smut tastes somewhat like mushrooms but has a smoky, sweet taste with a hint of corn flavor. She says it tastes great with vegetables, as a filling for meat and fish, as a soup or as a base for sauces, and can even be used to make ice cream (in some countries "fungus ice cream" is considered a real treat).

In order to avoid public confusion about the potential for toxicity from aflatoxin on field corn, Arnold accepts only smut from sweet corn. However, she says smut from field corn is also safe to eat.

Arnold asks farmers to remove the smut from the cob. Three small ears produce about a pound of smut. Arnold charges \$8 a pound for smut wholesale.

According to Arnold, only 10 to 20% of the ears in a normal sweet corn crop de-

velop smut. However, there are ways to induce smut so that up to 50% of the crop develops the fungus. One way is to use genetically susceptible sweet corn varieties such as Silver Queen, Quicksilver, Candy Bar II, or Burgundy. Another way is to apply organic fertilizer such as cow and chicken manure which normally stays in contact with the soil to encourage growth of the spores which are driven by the wind onto plants. The weather can also influence smut formation. For example, hailstorms cause injury to the corn plant making it more susceptible to smut development. Researchers are working on inoculation techniques that promote smut growth. "However, even if these techniques were perfected, inoculation would probably be too labor intensive for practical large-scale use," she notes.

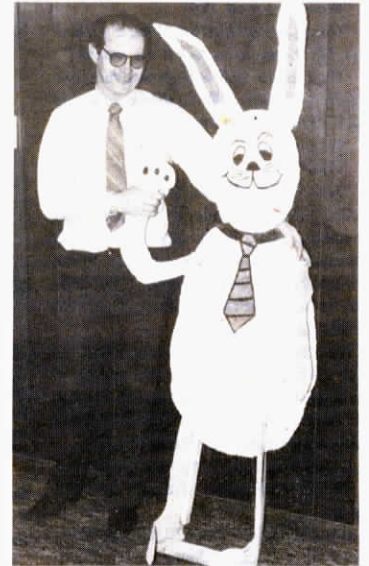
Smut is harvested by hand about three weeks after mid-silk or 7 to 10 days before sweet corn is ready for harvest, when the smut growths still have a white membrane and are fleshy. Smut must be picked in the morning when it's still cool and kept out of sunlight. Leaves should be left on for extra protection and insulation. Freshly picked smut should also be refrigerated.

Corn smut is extremely fragile and must be picked by hand because it damages easily. It will deteriorate quickly if the smut growths are punctured. "We haven't found a way to harvest corn smut on a large-scale basis without ruining it," says Arnold. "Corn smut has a short shelf life of only five days and should be frozen because it disintegrates under the pressure of its own weight. Growers check fields twice a week for ripe smut and harvest only cobs that are at least 50% covered with smut. It isn't cost effective to harvest cobs with less smut."

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, El Avionado, 540 E. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10009 (ph 212 477-8947).

This Easter Bunny's The Talk Of The Town

This scrap-metal Easter Bunny shows up every year in Annawan, Ill. Twenty-three years ago the ag teacher at the local high school, along with several accomplices, welded together a bunch of sheet metal and auto aprts to create the 6-ft. tall creature. They then loaded it in a truck and in the middle of the night deposited it on the lawn of Dean and Jean Larson. The Larsons stored the rabbit in their garage and the next year at Easter they deposited it on someone else's lawn. The tradition has continued every year since then. On Easter, some residents drive around town until they find out who received the unusual lawn ornament. Photo shows Vern Griffiths of Annawan, who found the "dumb bunny" on his lawn one Easter. He spent the next year deciding who should be the next lucky recipient.



The 36-rider bicycle is ridden by a group of Shriners who travel all over the world.

CARRIES 36 RIDERS AND WEIGHS 10,000 LBS.

"World's Longest Bike"

What has 72 legs, 36 heads, weighs 10,000 lbs. and zig-zags like a snake? No, it's not a creature from outer space. It's actually the world's longest bicycle which showed up at a parade in Chicago last fall.

The amazing 36-rider bicycle travels all over the world as an attention-getting, fund raising vehicle and is ridden by a group of Shriners from Milwaukee who call themselves the "Long Riders". The purpose of the attention-getting bike is to raise funds to support the Shriner's Hospitals for Crippled Children.

Designed as a class project by a group of Marquette University engineering students, the bicycle has four sections, 36 pedaling units, and weighs nearly 10,000 lbs. A spe-

cial trailer was built to transport the bicycle and follow it along the parade route. Men on the team range in age from 30 to 70 and are all members of the Tripoli Temple. The Long Riders have taken the bike to several Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans as well as to events in Las Vegas and Toronto. In 1988, a Japanese television crew produced a documentary about the bicycle, which aired on a popular Japanese television show.