



Mathwig owns the entire Northrup King Seed cloth sack collection as well as numerous other rare seed corn sacks, many dating back to the early 1900's.

**INCLUDES MANY OF THE FIRST CLOTH SEED CORN SACKS EVER PRODUCED**

## “World's Largest” Seed Corn Sack Collection

Seed corn dealer Martin Mathwig knew there were still old cloth seed corn sacks around, many dating back to the early 1900's, but he didn't know how many until he started collecting them eight years ago. Now the Dunnell, Minn., farmer claims to own the “world's largest” cloth seed corn sack collection.

Mathwig's collection numbers somewhere between 1,000 and 1,100 and contains a number of “firsts” and rare corn sacks, as well as sacks that were used to hold everything from car tire chains to smoked hams to rutabagas. The collection includes the first two seed corn sacks used by Pioneer (actually marketed by the Hi-Bred Corn Company of Grimes, Iowa). Most sacks are made from either cotton or rayon, and most still have company logos and advertising slogans that remain unfaded and bright. Mathwig slips a rectangular piece of cardboard into each sack and hangs them for display on the walls of his machine shed.

“I got the idea one day while I was in my shed and spied a few forgotten sacks. I asked myself, ‘How many more are out there?’ I didn't realize at the time there would be so many different kinds. It's surprising that so many actually survived because not only did the mice get them, but the washing machine did too. I know of a few other sack collections, but I have yet to meet anyone with a bigger collection.”

When word got around that Mathwig had an interest in cloth sacks, his collection began growing. He placed a small advertisement in a local newspaper and the response was overwhelming. Farmers picking up seed saw his display and brought their sacks over. He also looks for sacks at auctions, antique shops, and collector's swap meets and uses duplicate sacks for trading and selling. He asks auctioneers to buy sacks for him at estate sales.

Most of the sacks still retain tags with information about the seed corn. This information helps Mathwig accurately date the age of the bags. He inventories most of his sack collection in a black, vinyl-covered notebook. The listing includes the type of sack, where it was purchased, and a grade. An unwashed sack in excellent condition gets an “A”. A mediocre sack in faded condition might get a “C”.

Sacks would often be used as towels or even clothing. “When times were tough farm wives used the sacks to sew their families' clothing and make dish towels, pillows, and curtains. I remember my mother sewing cotton sacks together and making bed sheets out of them,” says Mathwig. “Many of the sacks contained instructions for removing the ink. But sacks with the ink removed have no value for me.”

Some sacks offered incentives to the farmers who purchased them. One of Mathwig's seed corn sacks, a 1952 Renk's, offers to give away three Allis-Chalmers tractors to farmers producing the three highest yields of the season. “That's when top corn yields were about 110 to 115 bu. per acre,” Mathwig notes.

Other rare seed corn sacks in Mathwig's collection include a 1924 Dekalb sack, a 1948 Jacques sack, and the first Funk Brothers sack. He owns the entire Northrup King Seeds cloth sack collection and has even received an offer from the company to buy the set. He has seed corn sacks distributed by Montgomery Ward, Sears & Roebuck, and Gamble's, and some sold by South Carolina and Tennessee plantations. Most sacks bear the names of the 16 original sack-producing factories in the U.S. and Canada, including Bemis, Chase, Cincinnati and Fulton, four companies that are still in business.

Mathwig owns just one cloth soybean seed sack. “Soybean seed was introduced just when high cotton prices were forcing sack manufacturers to switch from cotton to paper, so cloth soybean seed sacks are rare.”

According to Mathwig, old cloth sacks lose their value once they're washed. “People think washing a dirty sack will make it nice and clean, but it also ruins the logo,” says Mathwig; who recently began using some of his more common Pioneer cloth seed corn sacks to make stuffed teddy bear toys that have the company name across the face.

Anyone interested in selling cloth sacks to Mathwig should send a list of available sacks, name of company, and sack condition, including whether it's washed or unwashed.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Martin Mathwig, RR 1, Box 63, Dunnell, Minn. 56127 (ph 507 695-2587 or 602 878-9048).

**FARM SHOW**

# Ag World

**Editor's Note:** Most of what goes into Ag World stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of FARM SHOW touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching - everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit. If you've read or heard a good Ag World type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: FARM SHOW, Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.



Lester Larsen is shown at the wheel of the IH powered cultivator. It was built in 1915.

**FORERUNNER OF THE FARMALL TRACTOR**

## IH Power Cultivator Was First-Of-Its-Kind

“It's one of the most unusual pieces of farm equipment ever built,” says Lester Larsen, professor emeritus at the University of Nebraska and former head of the Nebraska Tractor Tests, about this IH powered cultivator built in 1915.

Larsen now oversees a collection of antique tractors owned by the University of Nebraska. Each year he sets up a tractor exhibit for the Nebraska State Fair. Last summer he managed to borrow this one-of-a-kind powered cultivator from its Colorado owner for the fair.

“When this tractor was built it was difficult to cultivate corn with a tractor because they didn't have 3-pits. International Harvester built this machine to do the job but it never caught on,” says Larsen, noting that the company built 400 machines before giving up. The last one was sold in Mankato, Minn. in July, 1920.

The machine was easily tipped over due to the high positioning of the engine. The engine and rear steering/drive wheel assembly pivoted as a single unit on turns, making

for an extremely short turning radius. The operator was seated ahead of the engine right above the cultivator gangs, giving perfect visibility. It apparently worked great but because it could only be used for cultivating represented a sizable investment for limited use.

Larsen says that at the time the motored cultivator was introduced, powered cultivators were a big marketing craze. Many other companies got into the act, including many small companies that went out of business soon after. Of all the powered cultivators on the market in 1917, none were still on the market several years later. International continued to use the motor cultivator in their development of a general-purpose tractor and the Farmall row crop tractor later developed from it when they turned the machine around, put the engine at the back and the steering wheel assembly up front.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Lester F. Larsen, 1205 N. 42nd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68503 (ph 402 466-1128).