

Smörgåsbord



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**Sizing Up The Seed
Corn Industry**

Here's how Dan Looker, agribusiness writer writing in a recent issue of the Des Moines (Iowa) Sunday Register, sizes up the hybrid seed corn industry:

For the seed industry, 1990 brings a return to normal — ample supplies and fierce competition.

For farmers, that increased competition will mean little or no increases in prices this year and a wider selection of new hybrids.

Pioneer introduced 24 new numbers last year, including seven in Iowa. Northrup King is bringing out 14 new corn hybrids.

The fall artillery for the battle — television advertising — has been employed with plenty of assaults on the mighty empire of Pioneer — the world's largest seed company and the only one to claim double-digit — in fact, more than a third — of the U.S. corn market.

Within the industry, competitors say they sense a breach in Pioneer's marketing fortress. Bob Strait, regional agronomist for DeKalb-Pfizer genetics in Fort Dodge, Iowa, said he regards Pioneer's flurry of new releases as evidence that the company recognizes the weakness of some of its older hybrids. "I'd say it's the biggest release group I've seen in the 10 years I've been in the business," he said.

In DeKalb's fiscal year ended last Aug. 31, it sold about 9% of the seed corn used in the United States, almost unchanged from the year before. Pioneer's market share slipped slightly in 1989, to about 34% of the nation's planted acres from 35% in 1988. Company officials attributed the drop to a switch to soybean acreage in parts of the eastern Corn Belt, where Pioneer usually has strong sales.

But Jay Johnson, an independent crop consultant who works with about 35 farmers in the Waterloo area, said, "The last couple years, Pioneer has not been ranking real high in most test plots."

Five years ago, Pioneer was "strong across the entire maturity ranges in the nation's corn-growing areas. In the future, though, I don't know whether one company is going to be truly dominant across all the maturity ranges again."

Although Pioneer still has many loyal customers in his area, clients of Johnson who might have planted 80% of their acreage with Pioneer earlier in the decade now plant "probably 30 to 50%," he said.

But no one seriously expects Pioneer to fall far in the battle for market share.

The company will remain first in seed sales worldwide for some time to come — "There's no question about it," said John Kaiser, vice president of L. William Teweles Co. of Milwaukee. Pioneer's share of seed-corn sales is strong in other important markets, as well as in the United States, said Kaiser, who has tracked the seed industry for 12 years.

The company has 50% of the seed-corn market in France, western Europe's Corn Belt, he said. And it has between 75 and 80% of the market in Hungary, the most prosperous of the neo-capitalist East Bloc nations.

Pioneer also beat its competitors last summer, becoming the first U.S. seed company to produce a crop of seed used for silage corn in the Soviet Union.

Pioneer's worldwide seed sales reached \$887 million in

1989, up 18% from \$750 million in 1987.

The sales of Sandoz Ltd. of Switzerland, owner of Northrup King and the second-largest seed company in the world, rose 25%, from \$360 million to \$450 million, according to Samuel Isaly, an analyst with S.G. Warburg and Co. in New York. Much of Sandoz' growth has come from acquiring other seed companies, including a Swedish business last year, Isaly said.

Nor are all Pioneer hybrids suddenly being outperformed in Iowa. "Their 3379 did well in 1989 in the southern third of the state," said Kenneth Ziegler, an agronomist in charge of Iowa State University's independent seed-corn evaluation program.

Pioneer's president, Thomas Urban, sounds just as confident as his competitors. The company's market share fell in 1989 because the company couldn't supply enough of its newest hybrids to keep up with demand, he said.

Asked whether DeKalb is taking market share from Pioneer in northern Iowa, Urban replied: "I think that may be wishful thinking...Pioneer is regaining market share. We have about 24% more seed on order right now than we had last year at delivery."

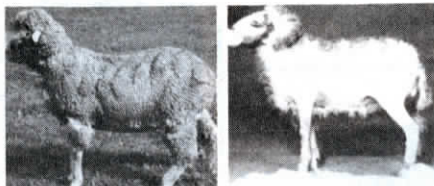
**Shearing Sheep
Without Shears**

From Australia comes word that biological wool harvesting could be commercially viable for sheep producers in the next year or two. Power Farming magazine reports that Coopers, an animal health firm, has developed a process that shows little difference between biologically harvested and shorn wool. The only apparent side effect — a slight drop in fertility — can be avoided if the technique is not used during breeding periods.

Biological wool harvesting involves the intramuscular injection of an epidermal growth factor (EDF) which occurs naturally in sheep. The extra dosage of EGF causes weakening of subcutaneous hair follicles. When the weakened follicles are pushed through the skin by natural hair growth, they break, causing the fleece to fall off.

It takes about two weeks from the time of injection for the fleece to be stripped from the animal, and then another four weeks to allow a new subfleece to grow.

A plastic fishnet coat has been developed to retain the



wool on the sheep until they're corralled for wool harvesting. The coat, put on when the animal is injected, not only holds the fleece against the animal to keep it warm, but also protects against burrs and seeds.

When the coat is removed, the fleece simply falls off, leaving a new coat about 1/3 in. long which has been growing beneath the old fleece.

Researchers believe use of the coat is essential to allow the new covering of wool to grow before the animal is exposed. Without the coat, the fleece would drop off, leaving the animal without any wool and obvious problems with exposure.

To harvest the wool, researchers have developed a conveyor belt system. Sheep are placed on the belt on their backs and shunted past "shearers" who first pluck wool from the animal's belly, then turn it over and strip the fleece off the back. The entire process takes less than one minute and the fleece stays together in the same way as a shorn fleece.

At this stage, the cost of the EGF dosage, a key determining factor in commercial applications, isn't known.

**Cheaper Bunkers Topple
Upright Silos Sales**

Construction of upright concrete silos has gone into the pits during the 1980's. A silo boom saw 15,000 new units built in 1980, but by 1989 the number had plummeted by 90%...to an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 units. The number of manufacturers has also dipped from 150 to about 40 during that period.

Price is the big benefit of bunkers. Current costs run \$40 to \$50 per linear foot delivered and installed, or about 60% the cost of a conventional upright silo. A 30 by 10 by 90 ft. horizontal silo holds 160 tons, and costs \$9,900, without equipment. A 20 by 60 ft. upright version with the same capacity will run between \$16,000 and \$17,000.

"Because of their greater cost, there's not much justification for building an upright silo today, except for the smaller farmer who want to feed high moisture corn," says Gerald Bodman, University of Nebraska extension ag engineer. "Upright silos don't fit large operations and are often too expensive for beginning farmers. I don't recommend uprights to anyone with over 100 dairy cows or 300 head of beef." (Excerpted from Farm Industry News).

**For All Of Us
Born Before 1945**

We are survivors — witnesses to tremendous, unbelievable change.

We were born before television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen food, contact lenses — even frisbies. We'd never heard of the pill. Main roads were dirt roads and night times were quiet.

We were born before radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ballpoint pens. We were even born before pantyhose, dishwashers, clothes dryers, electric blankets, air conditioners and drip-dry permanent press clothing. Man only walked on the moon in comic books. Farms were without electricity and no one ever heard of a Real Estate agent. Everyone's water was fit to drink. Fast food was yesterday's meat between two slices of home-baked bread, without butter. A "meaningful relationship" meant getting on well with the relatives on both sides of the family.

Born before 1945, we never heard of FM radios, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, heart by-pass operations, word processors or yogurt. Time sharing meant togetherness — not condos. A "chip" meant a piece of wood and hardware really meant hardware. Software wasn't even a word.

Grass was mowed and coke was a drink. Pot was something you cooked in. "Making out" referred to your school work and who ever heard of pizzas, McDonalds or instant coffee?

We hit the scene when there were 5 and 10 cent stores where you bought things for 5 and 10 cents. For a nickel you could buy a soda, cigar, attend a circus, make a phone call, and buy enough stamps to mail a letter or five one-cent postcards. You could buy a new Chevy or Ford coupe for \$600. Gas was 11 cents a gallon.

Us folks born before 1945 were the very last generation that was dumb enough to think you needed a husband to have a baby. No wonder we sometimes are so confused and there's such a large generation gap.

But we survived! And here we are! What better reason to celebrate? What better reason to enjoy? (Anonymous).

"Sensible Agriculture"

Hot off the press is "Sensible Agriculture," a new monthly newsletter for farmers who feel "there's got to be a better way." The charter issue tells about:

• A Nebraska farmer who interseeds corn with winter rye during the last cultivation to control weeds without chemicals.

• A Minnesota farmer who cuts fertilizer costs, without reducing yields, by basing nitrogen needs on a soil nitrate test when corn is 6 to 12 in. tall.

• An Iowa farmer who knives N, P and K into ridge-till corn in the fall to improve fertilizer efficiency.

"You won't find any odd-ball, back-to-nature preaching in Sensible Agriculture," says publisher Greg Northcutt. "Articles focus on how profit-minded mainstream farmers can make money by conserving their cash, preserving their resources and protecting the environment."

For a FREE sample copy and subscription information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Northcutt Communications, P.O. Box 1921, Bothell, Wash. 98041 (ph 206 776-9356).

Back Issues Available: New subscribers often ask if they can buy back issues. We can supply copies of the Jan-Feb. issue for 1990, all six issues published in 1989, and all but the Nov.-Dec. issue for 1988. Send \$2 per issue to: FARM SHOW, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, MN. 55044 (ph 612 469-5572).