

THE SELECTION OF SEED CORN

No Work Done On The Farm Is of More Importance Than Making a Careful Selection of Seed--Now Is the Time To Attend To It.

For the amount of labor involved no work upon the farm pays better than seed selections. Within a seed is the minute germ that has all the characteristics of the preceding generations of that species, with the modifications which the culture, soil, climate, and selection have given it, and these it transmits to the future plants. In addition, the seed contains a little food to help the germ until the plant can become established in the soil.

While the types in seed are persistent along general lines, within their limits they admit of modification by selection and cultivation.

When a farmer buys high-grade seed at a large price he is simply paying another man for using his brain to do what he can do just as well if he will.

IMPROVEMENT OF CORN BY SEED SELECTION.

Corn is one of the easiest plants to modify with which the farmer has to deal, and there is no plant that will respond more quickly to intelligent efforts at improvement. Corn is also very susceptible to the effect of a change of climatic or soil conditions; hence, it is very difficult to predict that the best variety at one place will prove to be the best in another locality. Owing to these facts we are liable to many disappointments in purchasing new varieties of corn, and this emphasizes the importance of at least one farmer in each community making it a business to select his seed corn with a view to obtaining the best variety for his section. In fact, this improvement of corn by selection is so simple that there is no reason why each farmer should not give it his attention. Unless this is done, seed will soon deteriorate and it will be necessary to purchase improved seed corn if it is desired to obtain the best results. Farmers' Bulletin No. 229, entitled "The Production of Good Seed Corn," is a treatise on the selection and care of seed corn which should be in the hands of every farmer.

The following is a brief outline

of just how to select seed corn:

The corn it is desired to improve should be planted on a specially prepared plat and well cultivated. When the plants have silked, go through the field and remove all plants that have not started an ear. After this and before harvesting, go through the plat carefully and select the best stalks, marking them so they can be readily distinguished.

An ideal stalk is one without suckers, thick at base, with well-developed roots, as shown by its growth, and bearing a good ear or ears about 4 feet from the ground. The stalk when mature should be between 8 and 10 feet high.

If it is desired to produce early variety, only those stalks that mature first should be marked.

Select stalks that are free from smut or disease and are not in the immediate neighborhood of other diseased stalks. The stalk should have two good ears upon shanks 4 or 5 inches long, and these ears should show a decided tendency to turn down.

GATHERING AND STORING THE SEED EARS.

As soon as the corn is sufficiently dry it should be carefully gathered and housed. In gathering for seed, gather only from the selected stalks that have two ears. If there are two good ears on a stalk, take both. If one is poor, select only the good one. Gather for seed only those ears that have the end covered with a close-fitting shuck, as this is a very effective protection against the weevil. Except as stated, not much can be done in selecting the ear at this time. Store the ears in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place and not in too great a bulk, so there will be no danger of heating. Seed corn should also be kept from freezing.

When the opportunity presents itself during the winter, this seed corn should be carefully shucked and the best ears selected.

THE IDEAL EAR.

An ideal ear of corn is nearly

cylindrical in shape, tapering only slightly from the butt to the tip. The tip should be fairly abrupt. The rows of corn should be straight and compact, commencing close to the shank and extending clear over the end of the cob to the tip. The cob should be of medium size, about one-half the diameter of the ear at a distance of one-third from the base, and the length of the ear should be about four times its diameter. Extra large or extra long ears should be avoided as much as small ears.

The grains of the ear should be of uniform size and should fit snugly. They should be fairly long, nearly flat on the sides, and slightly tapering on both edges. The dent should be only slight and the outer ends should be well filled out and not chaffy.

THE SEED PATCH.

When ready to plant, select from this lot of corn as many ears as are necessary for the seed patch, of as nearly uniform color, shape, and size as possible. Remove the imperfect and irregular grains at tip and butt and plant the remainder in carefully prepared ground. Have the seed patch as far removed from other cornfields as can be, so as to avoid mixing.

Give this patch special care and cultivation, and practice the same care in selection each year. The patch should not be too large; one-fourth to one-half acre is ample for the average farm. After making final selection for the seed patch, the remainder of the selected corn can be used for the main crop. By keeping up this practice of selection from year to year a wonderful improvement can be made in the yield and quality of corn.

It has been demonstrated that, all other conditions being equal, an average increase in the yield over common corn of from three to five bushels per acre can be made the first year. As the whole crop is improved, of course this rate of increase will not be so rapid, but if persisted in from year to year the careful selection of seed will have an ultimate marked effect upon the corn yield.

HOW THE FARMER MAY PROFIT BY SEED SELECTION.

The farmer who follows this practice of seed selection persistently will not only be repaid in the increased yield of his corn, but he will soon find that he can command quite a premium for it from his less progressive neighbors by selling it to them for seed at a price much greater than ordinary seed corn commands. The satisfaction of knowing that he has a better corn for his conditions than can be purchased at any price will be an additional compensation.

The South is in greater need of improved varieties of corn than is the case with any of her other crops. Cotton has received fairly good attention, but the corn crop has been sadly neglected. Our people are beginning to realize its importance, and quite a remunerative field of industry awaits the farmer who will make a business of raising reliable seed corn. Owing to the fact that corn is so easily influenced by a change of climate and soil, the field for this industry is very broad and

GERMINATION TEST FOR SEED CORN.

A great amount of trouble in securing stands from purchased seed, and especially that of corn, is due to the fact that much seed so obtained is of low vitality. When it is necessary to purchase seed corn, the seller should always be required to guarantee a germination of 100 per cent. Always buy seed corn upon the ear; then you can form some idea of what is being purchased. Afterwards test its germinative powers as follows:

Have an ordinary box about 12 inches wide, 18 inches long, and 12 inches deep. Put into the bottom 8 inches of horse dung, wetting it well and packing it into the box. On top of this place 2 inches of well-dampened sandy soil and fit a piece of muslin or thin cloth into the box on top of this. The muslin should previously have been marked into 1-inch squares with a pencil or ink, these squares being numbered. Now number the ears to be tested to correspond with the squares. Take three grains of corn from each ear, one near the butt, one at the middle, and one near the tip, taking each grain from a different row. Place each set of grains on the square of muslin corresponding to the number of the ear. When all the squares, or as many as you have ears to be tested, are occupied, cover them with several thicknesses of a damp, heavy cloth and set the whole in a warm place.

In about seven or eight days, or even in a shorter time if the weather is warm, examine the grains and take for seed only those ears from which all the grains have germinated. This precaution will avoid much disappointment in securing stands. —S. A. Knapp, special Agent in Charge of the Farmers' Co-operative Demonstration Work of U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

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