

Member's Name: Cleta Stewart Riggins

NSDOAF Member's National Number: 949

Name: Frank Stewart

Title: Seed Corn

To all my farmer friends: Thought you might enjoy reading some history

Stewart Hybrids of Princeville, IL began when a farm advisor asked Frank if he would like to work and develop hybrid seed corn. This was in the early 1930s. He had to grow corn, self-pollinate it (sack the tassel then put the sack of pollen on the ear of corn).

He sacked the tassel, and when full of pollen, would put it on an ear on a different stalk. After a number of years of this, Mr. Stewart had hybrid corn to sell to other farms. He specialized in corn that would do well in his central Illinois location. In 1936 and 1937, 1.5 acres of seed was produced. A seed house was built on the farm at this time. A bushel sold for \$7.50.

In those early years Mr. Stewart would put some kernels of corn on a cloth laid on damp sand, between two dinner plates, the top on upside down. He'd begin checking these kernels in about a week to see if they germinated. If so, he was satisfied and would plant that variety in the spring.

The first grading machine he had was about three or four feet long, on four legs, about five feet high. The cylinder turned with a handle. Four different sizes of kernel came out of different spouts. Farmers had specific plates for each size kernel. I remember small round as well as flat kernels. We hid this in the kitchen on winter nights.

Mr. Stewart continued developing and producing seed corn until his death in 1963. In 1948 his son, Dana, took over the operation and expanded it. It has since been sold. Dana had nurseries in Florida for twenty years to jump the process of developing new seed, testing 1,000 to 2,000 new hybrids each of these years.

As Mr. Stewart's youngest daughter, I helped self-pollinate, cross pollinate, detassel, and sort corn in the fall, after drying, then before drying.

To detassel, my father did not want one leaf removed from the stalk with the tassel. (Now the whole top of the stalk is cut off.)

My mother, who enjoyed cooking on a cook stove on the west side of the house with no trees, prepared meals for the detassellers and ladies working in the fall sorting the corn. I helped with that, too.

This is why my daughter, Candi Corn, is collecting Stewart Hybrids memorabilia.

Someone made a logo for my dad. It was an 'S' intertwined with two ears of corn to look like the dollar sign.

Looking back in love,

Cleta Riggins