

Midwest Maize: How Corn Shaped the U. S. Heartland

By Cynthia Clampitt

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. 239. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$95.00; paperbound, \$19.95.)

Corn is a symbol of midwestern agriculture, and it drives the farm economy and food-processing industry, among other economic endeavors. It is a common food that traditionally has been consumed in many forms—such as cornbread, grits, canned corn, or as roasting ears. Today corn primarily serves as livestock and poultry feed that reaches family tables in the form of beef, pork, chicken, and dairy products, particularly milk. It is an old crop, developed in Mesoamerica from a grass known as *teosinte*, perhaps as early as 8,000 BC. Indian traders carried it northward, and different cultural groups bred the crop to meet various climatic conditions. Indian farmers would be astounded to see the twenty-first century genetically modified corn varieties that produce more than 200 bushels per acre and cover much of the region.

This study provides an engaging read about the history of corn in the Midwest. In many respects it serves as a ready reference for a host of questions about corn, explaining the differences between flint, flour, dent, pop, and sweet corn as well as providing traditional recipes. But the book is more than a reference compendium. Cynthia Clampitt places corn in the context of westward expansion, mechanization, and transportation, as well as meatpacking and social gatherings organized around harvest

time. Clampitt discusses draining the prairie, GPS systems that regulate planting and fertilizer applications, the significance of grain dryers, and center-pivot irrigation, all of which contributed to the origin, development, and expansion of the Corn Belt and its continued central role in midwestern agriculture.

Clampitt discusses a host of corn-related topics that easily could become a mere listing. She has, however, provided unity of organization, context, and explanation. For example, her discussion of the transition of popcorn from a farm novelty to a multi-million-dollar business is succinct and educational, as are her discussions of manufacturing corn flakes and oil and hybridization (95 percent of all corn acreage in the United States is planted with hybrid varieties). She touches on the benefits of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, and notes environmental problems as well as public health concerns about eating genetically modified corn in any form. Although Clampitt takes a relatively objective view of her subject, she is supportive of the corn business as farms or corporate industry. She also provides a good overview of corn's cultural significance in her discussion of public festivals and the ways that immigrants and African Americans have changed our food ways by using corn.

Clampitt has written a readable, useful book about an important aspect of midwestern agriculture. It is not a fact-laden study, but several points of factual correction are merited. John Deere's plow had a self-cleaning moldboard, not plowshare. Horse-powered corn binders were not used by many farmers because they were not practical. Horses could neither provide sufficient, consistent power to drive the mechanisms that cut the thick stalks and bound sheaves, nor easily power the implement across the corn field. The Payment-in-Kind program is not sufficiently explained to enable readers to understand the surplus-reduction process and income generation for corn farmers.

Even so, anyone interested in the history of American agriculture and the Midwest should find this study a good read. Consider it a must for midwestern libraries because it covers so many corn-related topics briefly and sensibly. It offers an informative introduction to the essence of midwestern agriculture and its related business and cultural significance.

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The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey: Memories from the Farm of My Youth

By Alan Guebert with Mary Grace Foxwell

(Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. 134. Illustrations. Paperbound, \$17.95.)

Alan Guebert, an agricultural writer and columnist, has gathered together a delightful collection of his columns that help us to remember what farm life was like fifty years ago. Guebert's home farm, named Indian Farm, located in southern Illinois not far from the Mississippi River, was a large farm for its time: when many midwestern farms were 160 acres, Indian Farm was 700-plus acres. It was also a dairy farm with 100 milk cows that had to be milked twice a day, every day.

Farming has changed dramatically in the past fifty-plus years. In 1960, farmers made up more than eight percent of the U. S. population. Today, they comprise less than two percent. For hundreds of years, farming changed little; however, after World War II, tractors, electricity, hybrid crop varieties, fertilization, and modern weed control all helped transform American farms, farming, and farmers.

Guebert, with his wonderfully well-crafted stories, teaches us not