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SO YOU WANT TO BE A SEEDSMAN?¹

By Wayne G. McGowan, Jr.²

A seedsman is an important cog in the agricultural machine today. There is a definite need for a good seedsman in nearly every agricultural community, and the person who fulfills the requirements of a good seedsman can be in an enviable position.

Most men must choose between two ways of life. One may choose to devote his life to working for his fellow man. A teacher, a preacher, or a scientist does not work for personal gain, but rather for the joy of serving or accomplishing. On the other hand, one may work for personal gain, either for money or power, as does a businessman or politician.

A good seedsman may fulfill all of these desires. He will have the joy of knowing that he is partly responsible for the increased yields of crops and the resulting higher standards of living in his area. He will have the respect that every man desires, and he will be well rewarded financially.

A seedsman has an excellent opportunity, but with his opportunity comes obligations. He cannot be a merchant who simply sells any produce that yields a profit.

An unscrupulous businessman in other fields of merchandising may sell an undesirable product to his customers and thus distribute a small loss to each of them. However, if a seedsman does this, he will multiply the loss, since each farmer will probably lose more due to the poor crop resulting from undesirable seed than the seedsman would have lost had he destroyed the seed.

For this reason, it is his duty to sell only those seeds that his

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customers should buy, and not necessarily the product that yields the greater profit. Often an inferior product is easier to sell than the proper one, but a seedsman who sells or allows his competitor to sell an inferior product is hurting his customers as well as his own business. It is, therefore, the responsibility of each seedsman to educate his customers so that they will know what they should purchase.

Formerly the seed business was a sideline. Nearly every general store and elevator handled seed and even today a lot of seeds still move through these channels.

It soon became apparent that this was not a satisfactory method, since the dealer could not afford to spend much time on such a small portion of his business. As a result, the merchant knew little about his products and he frequently handled some products that were unsatisfactory for his customers' purposes. As new and improved varieties were developed, the situation became more acute. Farmers began to realize that they needed a reliable source of seed. As a result, a new and specialized industry started to develop.

Probably hybrid corn did more to speed the development of the seed industry than anything else, since, unlike most other seeds, it cannot be handled haphazardly with any hope of success.

Seed Business Growing

The seed business is still growing and there is a place in it for a person who can qualify. Many unqualified people go into the seed business, but few remain there.

Your success or failure depends to a large extent upon your ability. You must know your field, but while most businessmen must know only one, you must be a specialist in several fields and possess other desirable traits, as well.

Probably the first requirement for a successful seedsman is honesty. It is easy and often tempting for a seedsman to sell seeds that are unadapted or of poor quality, and many succumb to this temptation. When he does, however, he loses his greatest asset, the confidence of his customers. Without this confidence he will have few customers, since most farmers depend on their seedsman to furnish them with seed suitable for their needs.

Keep Mistakes Small

The seedsman must keep his mistakes small, so that he can take the resulting loss without passing it on to his customers. He can keep mistakes small by knowing his varieties. Many farmers do not keep up with new varieties, but depend upon their seedsman to advise them of their needs.

A large portion of his seed stock is purchased by the seedsman at the time of harvest. The seedsman usually processes and stores these seeds for at least 6 months before he resells them. Since seeds are relatively expensive, the amount of capital invested in them is frequently large, and severe price fluctuations are dangerous and even ruinous. So it is important for the seedsman to be able to estimate the production, consumption and price of seeds with accuracy. If he cannot do this, he will have severe losses.

Storage Losses Important

Another important factor in handling seed is the loss that occurs during storage and cleaning. Seed cleaning and storage require knowledge as well as skill. Very often the profits of a seedsman go out the back door in the sacks of screenings. Efficient operation of seed-cleaning machinery, so as to do a good job of cleaning with a minimum loss of seed, is essential to a seedsman who wishes to make money.

A seedsman may be an efficient operator, sell only quality seed, and be a market expert, but he will not succeed unless he is a salesman. He must sell himself and his product to the farmer.

Probably the best way to be a successful seed salesman is to pass helpful information on to the farmer. Many farmers depend on their seedsman to furnish them with good agronomic information. If he does this, then these farmers and others will come to him to obtain this information, and to purchase seed as well. This is probably the soundest basis for selling that a seedsman has.

Opportunity for You

There is an opportunity for you in the seed business, if you can qualify. If you cannot qualify, you will only hurt yourself and others by going into it. But if you can fulfill the need, you will become an important cog in the agricultural machine.