

Open Pollinated Sweet Corn Almost Ready For Market

Martin Diffley hopes people won't eat all his new open pollinated (OP) sweet corn this fall. He needs to save some of the seed for next year's crop. Diffley and his partners in the venture, the nonprofit Organic Seed Alliance and University of Wisconsin-Madison seed researcher Bill Tracy, have been working on the new variety since 2009.

"It's a good bi-color OP variety that tastes good," says Diffley. "We feel really good about it and think it will be available to buy in 2014. We don't have a name for it yet, but we think we have a breeder grower who will produce it for sale."

Diffley worked with corn lines preserved and developed by Tracy. He raised them in organic field plots, cross breeding and selecting first for good soil vigor, a healthy stalk and good disease suppression.

"I was able to focus on other attributes as well, such as ear placement, and then the edible portions of the ear, the kernel,"

he says.

Diffley points out that most modern hybrids have been bred to be super sweet. While other sweet corn sugars start to turn to starch once they are picked, super sweets get sweeter after harvest so they can be transported to distant markets.

Diffley says his OP corn has a mid range sweetness, referred to as "sugar enhanced". It's sweeter than old-fashioned Bantam sweet corn, but retains its corn flavor.

"With the super sweet, the corn taste was lost," he says. "Sugar enhanced and older sweet corn varieties have the flavor and sweetness if picked locally and eaten fresh."

Diffley says he bred and selected his OP variety to have good corn flavor, good texture with a tender pericarp (kernel exterior) and a creamy mouth feel. He also selected it for uniform ripening. OP sweet corn varieties are known for a wide ripening window. Hybrids have a tight window so they can be picked all at once.

"We wanted a variety that could be used with sequential planting so there would be a certain amount ripe every few days," says Diffley. "It'll be good for home gardeners and market gardeners."

He's satisfied his variety will meet market needs in the upper Midwest. However, he hopes it will be further selected and improved as people try it and save seed.

"If someone wants to move this corn to another bioregion and select it for that area, they are welcome to do so," says Diffley. "Whatever they want to do, they are welcome to do."

Diffley suggests readers interested in trying the new sweet corn contact him to have their name put on a list for seed.

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Martin Diffley says his open-pollinated sweet corn is sweeter than old fashioned Bantam sweet corn, but retains its corn flavor.

Alliance, P.O. Box 772, Port Townsend, Wash. 98368 (ph 360 385-7192; info@seedalliance.org; www.seedalliance.org).

She Makes Harnesses, Tack For Goats

Goats can do a lot of work with harnesses, pack saddles and other tack made by Bambi Iles. She knows her products work because she uses them on a daily basis with 15 of her goats that help work on her small farm in Aptos, Calif.

"Goats are very intelligent and easily trained. If a goat is bonded to the trainer, then training becomes very easy. Goats like to please their handlers, and they like to try to make you happy," Iles says.

She initially purchased two milking does to provide milk for the family. When the herd grew to 30, she needed to find a use for the wethers (neutered male goats).

"I needed to have something for the boys to do on our farm," she says. "I started by training them to pull things."

But the harnesses she could purchase were inadequate in the breeching, and the carts and implements would run up and hit the goats in the back legs. She created

an easily adjustable harness design with padding.

"I made it so it would function really well on the hills, and I add a lot of padding, especially the breast and girth," she explains. "I pad everything that might rub the goats. I'm always looking for ways to improve the comfort of the goat."

She uses quality leather and nylon webbing for adjustable harnesses and halters. Panniers are made of heavy-duty Cordura.

She uses her tack every day when she works her goats – from disking and cultivating the garden to pulling a wagon or hauling packs of firewood or veggies. She has even used some of her largest goats to skid logs out of the woods. On hikes, they make great pack animals, able to carry up to 25 percent of their body weight.

"You often don't have to haul feed for them as they can browse brush and weeds," Iles says.



Bambi Iles makes easy-to-adjust harnesses and halters for working goats.

She provides helpful information about raising and working with goats on a blog on her website, which she plans to use to sell her products. She also sells through Etsy (www.bilesharness.etsy.com). In addition to items for goats, she makes and sells tack for mini

horses. Adjustable goat halters start at \$18, including shipping.

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Custom Feedlot Geared To Sheep

"We run it like a cattle feedlot, but it's only for sheep," says Kyle Shippy about his family's business, Shippy Sheep Feed Lots in Colome, S. Dak. He also runs his own flock of 200 to 300 sheep.

Experienced in raising sheep since the mid 1970's, he opened for business as a feedlot in the early 1990's. The opportunity came mainly from sheep producers in areas where corn supplies are very limited. Others faced drought issues and wanted a place to fatten their lambs and maintain ownership. Most lambs are at Shippy's lots for about 90 days during the months between September and May to fatten up before being shipped to slaughter or the sale barn for auction.

"We have all the equipment, fencing, feed bunks, feed storage and working areas," he says. "We can sort 300 to 400 sheep in 20 min. with our alley and sorting gates."

He and his son, Dale, worm all the lambs when they come in and do routine care. Each owner's flock is marked with paint and kept in separate lots. Shippy sorts sheep by size to ensure they don't compete with larger lambs for feed.

Located in south central South Dakota, 40 miles from irrigated cornfields in

Nebraska, Shippy has access to plenty of corn in addition to the hay he grows on his own land. Another benefit is the soil.

"We are on sandy soil on the edge of the Sandhills in Nebraska, so the wool on the lambs doesn't get muddy, which is good for the slaughter house," Shippy says.

"Our lots are situated behind shelterbelts to provide wind and storm protection," he adds. "We prepare most of the feed, but you have the option of having feed of your choice delivered from one of the local elevators to our lots for your lambs."

He's had customers bring lambs from as far away as 900 miles. Most go directly from Shippy's to slaughter, but last year, a producer in an extreme drought area brought his ewe lambs to the feedlot just for the winter and took them back home in the spring.

Shippy says demand goes up and down according to lamb prices.

"Customers are gambling that the market goes up when they're ready to sell," he says.

With room for 3,000 lambs, there is plenty of room for new customers, Shippy says.

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Website Connects Customers To Local Egg Producers

Got eggs? Need to find customers? LocalHens.com offers a free service to market your business.

The website is easy to use, says Liz Howard, store manager for The Egg Carton Store in Fox Island, Wash. Just go to the LocalHens website, fill in as little or as much information as you want. You can add photos and link it to your own website, if you have one.

When someone is looking for a business selling eggs, they just go to the website and type in a zip code, and the egg sellers closest to them pop up.

"It's a handy marketing tool for small backyard farmers," Howard says. Bill Swanson, owner of The Egg Carton Store, developed the website to promote buying local and help egg producers. While he sells egg cartons, promotional material and other items for the industry, people don't have to be customers to be included on the free LocalHens website.

Howard oversees the 2-year-old website, which has about 650 egg producers listed. Now her focus is getting the word out to consumers through advertising, articles, Facebook, Twitter and The Egg Carton



LocalHens.com, a free website, makes it easier for small poultry farmers to market their eggs.

Store's website.

"We've had quite a few customers call to thank us for getting them new customers," Howard says. "People are definitely looking at the website."

Every couple of weeks LocalHens features one of its egg producers with photos and more details on the home page.

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