

IOWA HISTORY



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Best Corn Yields Silver Basket and Gasoline Engine

“Go away from town and get the news,” *Collier’s Magazine* advised its readers in 1910. With that in mind, the magazine traveled to an Iowa farm to feature a farmer who had earned an annual income of \$6,000 after expenses. Fred McCulloch of Poweshiek County had kept meticulous records related to the management of his 325-acre farm. His detailed charts and tables included information about the exact cost of planting, caring for and harvesting his grain, as well as the number of hours of labor expended by man and horses. He claimed many of his acres netted as high as \$18.50 per acre, while his field of timothy made a loss of \$3.06 per acre.

In addition to timothy, McCulloch grew corn and oats on his farm near Hartwick. His corn growing techniques had won him the coveted grand champion sweepstakes at the Iowa Corn Growers Association corn show held at the Des Moines Coliseum. His record 96 bushels per acre was better than any other in the state. McCulloch credited the “beautiful golden maize of the Reid yellow dent variety” for giving him the remarkable results.

McCulloch shared his secrets for superior oats yields with the *Greene Recorder* in the spring of 1910, after winning awards for oat growing. He said preparing the soil and the seeds were key to his success. According to McCulloch, the stalks should be “well broken,” raked and burned. Then the field should be given two good diskings, followed by a “good harrowing” the opposite way of the disc to level the field.

Seed preparation was just as important as soil practices. McCulloch criticized the methods used by many farmers, who backed up to the granary with an old end gate seeder and

scooped in the oats—dirt and all. He advised using only the plumpest oats treated for smut with a special recipe of formaldehyde mixed with water. After soaking the oats for 12 hours, the farmer should spread them out to dry thoroughly before sowing. Depending on the size of the seed, they should be sown at a rate of three to five bushels per acre, according to McCulloch.

Prizes at the corn show varied from a Wonder washer and a one-cross-cut saw to poultry food and sacks of cement. McCulloch's first place prize for his high corn yield at the corn show was a five-horsepower gasoline engine and a silver cup molded into the shape of a bushel basket. The silver cup was valued at \$150.

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Sources

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