



Farming in the 21st Century

A Farmer's view

5 Key Observations

1. Farming of today is easier, more accurate and actually better for the plants than it was a generation ago
2. Many IL farms have sections devoted to "field testing" or "test plots." The product grown in these areas are not used for human or animal consumption but are for research purposes only
3. Corn silk germinates each kernel on an ear of corn. The pollen is carried via the silk. In essence, the silk could be considered the corns' "umbilical cord."
4. Ninety-nine percent of the corn grown in the United States is "field corn" and is not grown for human consumption
5. Corn is actually a grass. It likes cool nights and warm days. (Kinda like some moms I know)



My Thoughts

Growing up in a large city, I wished that I could be like Fern in the book "Charlotte's Web" and run free on a farm. Instead I had to fight the smelly bus and car traffic just to get to the nearest playground. In my day-dreams, my parents would have a farmhouse surrounded by fields of golden corn. Our barn would be red, we'd have a cow named "Bessie" and there would be baby chickens pecking in our yard. Yes, I thought if all farms resembled Mr. Zuckerman's, I wanted to take the next bus to the country and visit my talking animal friends too.

But let's be honest, the picture of the small family farm that we urbanites hold dear is just a fairytale. Farming in the United States has always been big business and certainly not quaint to those responsible for

growing our food. In the past century, farming families have changed their focus from simply getting the greatest volume of product to producing the best crop for the most demanding (and highest paying) markets.

Active Involvement in Improving the Quality of Seeds

The IL Field Moms visited the Jeschke Family farm on May 18, 2013. The primary focus was to learn more about soy and corn farming. Even before we reached the farm, we learned that various family farms have “test plots:” used solely for seed companies to test and research the effectiveness of newly developed seeds. Thus these farmers have a vested interest in the successful outcomes gained from agricultural research.

“The new house is sitting in the shed”

The planter is the most important piece of equipment for a grain farmer. For the few minutes I sat with the Jeschke’s nephew, Tyson, I noticed multiple monitors that seemed to be calculating everything from the depths that the seeds are planted, to the amount of water in the soil as well as the best places to drop bull-seed rows. He told me that the machinery actually drives itself. With all of that accessible technology, what are they doing in the field?

Analyzing the information on the screen and making any adjustments necessary to ensure an optimal planting day. Farmers are also tracking the global markets to analyze future demands and talking to suppliers about their products. A planter alone costs an average of \$140 K. If a farmer doesn’t maintain the best quality machinery or has to spend time during the planting season repairing his planter, his fiscal bottom line can be seriously impacted. So when asked whether to spend the money on an addition to the house or on a new planter, inevitably, a farming family chooses the new machinery.

What’s the big deal about GMO versus non-GMO anyway?

This is a really “hot” button topic for a lot of people. In speaking with our host family, I learned that the use of genetically modified seed (GMO) has its positives and its negatives. A great deal of scientific research is done on the variety of available seeds before a company like Beck’s, decides to sell it to their customers. The main GMO product is used to avoid the infestation of root-worm and ensure that the plants are resistant to insects. As the demand for corn and soy-based products rises, any one insect infested harvest may negatively impact the global community in a given year.

If a farmer chooses not to use GMOs in his field, he must take extra steps to ensure that NO GMO related products cross with the non-modified seed. More time is taken to clean all of the equipment and the farmer has to fill out a significant amount of paperwork to ensure that his crop(s) are designated as “non-GMO.” Finally, because the seeds lack insect resistant protein, those farms growing non-GMO based seeds must spray herbicides and pesticides to ensure the *sustainability* of the crop.

Visiting the Jeschke’s farm gave me better sense of what farming in the 21st century looks and feels like. Like any successful business, it has had to grow and change to meet the ever-changing demands of the market. Yet, despite technological and bio-agricultural advancements, I didn’t feel like I was visiting a “food factory.” I was mesmerized by the beautiful home at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac. Large spring flowers were weaving in the air in front of the house and I was tempted to sit on the front yard, take a deep breath and enjoy the smell of spring.

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