SEEDSMEN HAVE BIG SHOES TO FILL\textsuperscript{1}

By Johnson E. Douglas\textsuperscript{2}

My seedsman should be a county agent, an agronomist, a psychologist, and a "good Joe" all rolled into one. That's a big order, but if you can fill the bill, you'll be in business for keeps.

Mr. Better-Than-Average Farmer is talking again. Let's listen more closely to what he has to say.

Seed handling is a relatively new business. From primitive man until less than 75 years ago, the farmer grew and used his own seed or got it from his neighbor. Then he found out that one of his neighbors always took special pains to give him clean, live seed that yielded more. This neighbor, probably a member of the State Agricultural Experiment Association or the newer Crop Improvement Association, eventually became the neighborhood seedsman. Later he may have set up shop in town to take care of the business.

In the meantime, seed production and selling became more and more highly specialized. Plant breeding became a science. The average farmer was more than willing to turn the ever-increasing chores of producing seed over to the seedsman neighbor.

Today, seed salesmanship is a vital link in this one-half billion dollar business. What the farmer expects of his seedsman or seed salesman and how well this obligation is met may very easily determine the success or failure of the seedsman.

What do I expect of my seedsman? (Mr. Farmer again.) First and foremost, I must have complete confidence in the man or organization with which

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I am dealing. Confidence can be earned but never bought. The sound advice and accurate information from a seeds salesman must always be honest.

For seed salesmanship to succeed, it must be backed by a quality product. Farmers expect good seed—seed of adapted varieties; seed true to the variety specified; seed properly cleaned, graded, and treated; seed free of disease; seed with a high germination; seed with good appearance. No amount of salesmanship can overcome weaknesses on these points. Certification programs throughout the nation have helped to put a "floor" under these items and assure farmers of definite minimum standards. It is for this reason that certified seeds are becoming more and more important to farmers. They like the added assurance of an unbiased inspection agency coupled with the integrity of the seedsman. The two make an ideal team working together for the good of the farmer.

Good seed salesmanship required too that the seedsman know and understand my problems and needs. The seedsman must be willing to take time to talk these problems and needs. The seedsman must be willing to take time to talk these problems over with his farmer customers and provide us with a "seed management service." As a result, the seedsman himself must truly know his product, the crop varieties—their maturity, their disease resistance, their adaptation, their performance records under various conditions, their standing ability, and their special uses.

For example, if I am going to take advantage of the Hessian fly resistance of Dual wheat and seed it early, I need to know in advance that I can't plant my late maturing varieties of corn or soybeans if I expect to follow them in my rotation with this pasture wheat. I must know which hybrid will perform best on upland soils or bottom ground, under irrigation, with thick planting, or with high fertilization. I must know which varieties are best adapted in my area, are resistant to stem canker or
frog-eye leaf spot, and are highest yielding. The good seed salesman will have the right answers to as many of these questions as possible.

My seedsman must be a good friend of the county agent so that he can take advantage of all the educational and informational services he has to offer. To help the seedsman keep up to date may universities have special seed dealer meetings at which new soils and crops information are channeled directly to them. Many of the state crop improvement associations have conferences and special events for the seedsmen producing certified seeds. All of these activities are very important and help a seedsman be a specialist in his business.

The seedsman who is producing his own or contracting seed should be close enough to the needs of this customers to anticipate their wants at least a year in advance. If he can do this and can offer what his customers want, his selling job is made much easier.

I expect to buy seed from my seedsmen at a fair and reasonable price. I realize his idea and my idea on this may differ. but if he is fair and has done a good job of educating me as to the value of good seed, I’m sure we can come to terms. The old adage “you get what you pay for” does not necessarily apply in the seed business. The notable exception to this is the “seed peddler” who sells “special varieties” at prices three or four times what the seed is actually worth. This is seed salesmanship too; but it is the kind that will let quick “mirage” profits wipe out the vision for larger future profits.

I know that advertising also is a necessary part of his job. But, for it to win and hold the confidence of farmers, it should be factual and not exaggerated. You can fool part of the farmers all of the time, some of them part of the time, but can’t fool all of them all of the time.

Advertising is a way of letting us know that you have something good. “Hiding your light under a bushel” is not fair to you or the farmer who
needs your service.

Seed salesmanship may include offering other services along with seeds—aid in soil testing, for example. Sometimes farmers expect too much from their seed. They forget such factors as soil fertility, weather etc. In his enthusiasm, the good seed salesman should be sure that he doesn't get carried away to the extent of forgetting to point out these factors. It's possible to oversell a product.

Some farmers like their seedsmen to carry chemicals, a complete line of seeds, and other items relative to the farmer's seed needs.

And, finally, if your salesmanship is successful, the buyer will think as you do about your product or service. If you are not sold on your own seeds, the battle is lost in the beginning. The farmer automatically expects you to be sold on it yourself.

As more and more varieties are offered for sale, the farmer will lean more heavily upon the crops advice and intelligence of his seedsmen. There will be an opportunity for all seedsmen—certified seed producers and their agents, local seed dealers, wholesale dealers, and others—to gain and hold the confidence of farmers. It will require the best salesmanship of every seedsmen to provide the farmer of tomorrow with the accurate information which he will want and the good seed of adapted varieties which he will need.