

A History of Foundation Seed Operations of the Committee for Agricultural Development at Iowa State University

RFR-A18127

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Introduction

In 2018, the Committee for Agricultural Development (CAD), an affiliate organization of ISU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, celebrated its 75th anniversary. As part of the anniversary, a history of CAD was written and organized into four articles. The articles cover CAD's origins, objectives and leadership, foundation seed, and farmland. One of the articles follows.

Foundation seed. In the 1950s into the 1970s, CAD seed operations were based at the Beach Avenue Seed Plant (Figures 1, 2, and 3). This facility was located at 420 Beach Avenue, Ames, southeast of the main campus where the ISU Alumni Center is currently located. The Beach Avenue Seed Plant site was originally a livestock facility for ISU. The original barn was remodeled and a small seed plant and flat storage were added. In the early 1970s, warehouses were built by CAD at the Curtiss Farm.

The seed operations were robust during these years. Oats and soybean made up the major seed sales. No doubt the seed sales stretched the Beach Avenue plant's capacity. David Starrett, retired ISU/CAD manager, remembers coming to work in the early 1970s, and the trucks would already be lined up waiting to pick up seed. Other farm retirees remember "combining acres of oats and

soybeans for seed and having to carefully clean combines between varieties." Popular soybean varieties were Corsoy, Williams, Hardin, and later Pella. Iowa's multiline oat varieties also were widely planted.

In response to the strong demand for public seed varieties of soybean and oats, CAD built a new seed plant at the Curtiss Farm, 2219 State Avenue, where CAD warehouses were located. The new plant opened in 1976.

In the 1970s, major trends were occurring in Iowa agriculture and the seed industry. First, oat acreage was declining and soybean acreage was increasing. More critical was the major entrance of seed companies. The U.S. Plant Variety Protection Act of 1970 gave plant breeders exclusive control over new varieties. The seed companies responded by investing in soybean seed development, breeding, processing, and marketing programs. Biotechnology also was nearing implementation. The private soybean seed lines would in time replace the public soybean varieties distributed by CAD almost entirely. This replacement began in the 1980s and was fully in place during the 1990s.

In response, soybean breeders and scientists at public universities, particularly Iowa State University, transitioned to developing specialty soybean varieties with attributes focused on niche markets like tofu or other food products. Soybean varieties with low linoleic acid, high protein, or other characteristics were valued for their unique properties. For example, Vinton 81, an Iowa soybean variety released in 1982, became the standard of the tofu industry for many years.

Currently, CAD oat seed increase and marketing has been suspended and CAD soybean seed activity continues, although smaller than the heyday of public varieties. The large Curtiss Farm seed plant was last used in 2008. A smaller soybean seed processing unit now serves the needs. CAD's recent peak in soybean seed units (50 lb/unit) was 40,325 in 1999. CAD marketed 7,280 units in 2015 and 11,153 units of soybean seed in 2016.

Note: For the purposes of this article the terms experiment station, college, station, college of agriculture and IAHEES are used interchangeably and refer to the Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences including its research arm, the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the archival research conducted by Dominic Snyder and the input of former CAD managers Lynn Henn and David Starrett. Further, the CAD files and ISU Library Archives were accessed.

References

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Figure 1. The Beach Avenue Seed Plant from Beach Avenue.



Figure 2. The Beach Avenue Seed Plant from the south, 1957.



Figure 3. A close up of the Beach Avenue Seed Plant from the east.