

For farmers this fall has been a long one. Many days in October were cold, cloudy and wet so the soybean harvest got delayed thus the corn harvest is delayed. Now this is the kind of fall if it happened 50 years ago would drag on until sometime just before Christmas. With today's machinery though, the soybean acres come out very fast. The corn acres don't come out quite as fast simply because of the yields. Dodge County in the past couple of years has averaged close to or over the 200 bushel per acre mark. I remember my dad and I would rent Marshall Svec's land and Marshall was always happy when the corn went over 100 bushels per acre.

Over the years in my farm broadcasting career, I've interviewed farmers who had won state and national yield contests. Corn can now top out over 500 bushels per acre and soybeans can get over 100 bushels per acre. I think back to the late 1950's when my dad bought his first self-propelled combine, an Oliver 40 that he got from Roberts Brothers Oliver dealership which for us was conveniently located just across the fence line from our farm. When I first reported on a 500 plus corn yield, it was a farmer in Georgia on some irrigated land that yielded 503.7 bushels per acre.

I was trying to think back to that Oliver 40 and how big a grain tank it had. I was thinking it would hold 60 to 70 bushels. Well I had to google the Oliver 40 and I came across an old newspaper ad for the Oliver Corporation. (You can see the newspaper ad below). The ad said that the shiny new Oliver 40 combine in its distinctive green color had a grain tank that held a whopping 57 bushels. Well first I'm trying to imagine getting 503 bushels of corn from one acre. Then I'm trying to imagine doing that with this old Oliver. You'd have to empty the grain tank 9 times just to get one acre done.

I went back to the ad again. Oliver made it sound like this self-propelled marvel could handle big yields. This particular ad from 1959 said the Oliver 40 takes all crops in stride, famed for its capacity. The picker out performs the best we've known 'til now. It's geared for high output all the way. The Oliver 40 features headers up to 16 feet, a 9 inch unloading auger and smooth 6 cylinder gas or diesel power. Now there's a combine! And what's more, it's a sheller too. It doesn't just do one job, it does three. Cuts, shells and shreds...all three at once. It brings in an extra bushel for every 8 you pick.

Randy Dowdy, the farmer in Georgia who won the National Corn Growers Association yield contest a couple years back with 503.7 bushels per acre should have used an Oliver 40. He would have ended up with 566 bushels per acre if it really gave you an extra bushel for every 8 you pick. Well I think Oliver and their ad agency might have been stretching it a bit there but it was a good combine. I remember one year, 1965 if memory serves, we had a wet fall and a lot of land was not tilled the way it is today. It was muddy and was not frozen yet. We were renting the old Grover Dengler farm. Grover had passed away but his widow Agnes was still living on the farm. Our Oliver combine had a two row cornhead. You could not put duals on

the combine with that narrow cornhead so my dad decided to use the soybean head to cut, shell and shred the corn. With the wider soybean head, we could put the duals on the combine. That was a very slow process but at least we didn't get stuck in the mud near as often.

As was the case, not many if any pictures exist from these days but I can still picture it in my mind. And I can feel the cold November wind from those days as well. That's one thing that hasn't changed. The machinery and the way farming is done today have certainly changed but the elements of the weather still remain. And if you're like me, certain smells take you back to a place in time. The smell of harvest in the fields instantly takes me back to those days of yesteryear.



I have an updated note since I wrote this column. David Hula of Charles City, Virginia has shattered any previous corn yield record. Hula is no stranger to breaking yield records. The Virginia farmer has topped the NCGA National Corn Yield Contest five times since 2003 in the Strip, Min, Mulch and Ridge-till Irrigated category. The previous world record of 542 bushels per acre was set by Hula in 2017. In 2019, he set an all-time best yield of 616.1953 bushels per acre on ground that he strip-tills. I think the old Oliver 40 combine would break down after about half an acre in a field like that.

Again you can scroll down and see that old Oliver ad. I just don't remember if Ed and Merv Roberts ran an ad like that in the paper. If they did, Roberts Bros Oliver in West Concord would have been put at the bottom of the ad. And you'll see where in the ad it says you'll bring in an extra bushel for every 8 you pick. So if you do the math, David Hula of Virginia would have actually harvested 693.1953 bushels per acre. Maybe he should have used an Oliver 40.

And one other note about 2019, the state winner in Minnesota in the same category as David Hula was David Heublein of Lewiston with a yield of 281.2691 bushels/acre. The top yield in Minnesota in the yield contest belonged to Kevin Bauer of Hastings in Strip-Till Irrigation with a yield of 297.8726.



Now a combine, now a corn sheller...*both* tops!

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