

490 to 830 to 1000 bushels

# Just how high can future corn yields go?

DEKALB, IL. — Corn yields have increased rather steadily over the years. From 1900 to 1980, the U.S. increase averages .8 bushels per acre per year. If you use 1979 instead of 1980, the upward trend is one bushel per acre per year. And, when hybrid corn first dominated U.S. acreage around 1940, the annual increase is more than 1.5 bushels per acre per year.

The lowest average yield since 1900 took place in 1934, when the crop only yielded 15.7 bushels per acre. The highest occurred in 1979, when U.S. corn growers produced per acre. It appears the national average will be between 90 and 91 bushels per acre for 1980.

Several individual reports of corn harvests exceeding 300 bushels per acre have been recorded. The top authenticated yield currently stands at 352 bushels per acre, set when Roy Lynn Jr., Schoolcraft, Mich. harvested that yield from a measured acre in 1977.

If you ask plant scientists what the theoretic maximum corn yield is, you'll get a range of answers that depend on assumptions made. Some place the figure at over 1,000 bushels per acre. Another school of

thought places the maximum at 830 bushels per acre. A recent thoughtful paper suggests that 490 bushels per acre is a practical maximum for the central U.S. corn belt.

There's a huge difference between what the average U.S. farmer is harvesting and the suggested maximum. Using 1980 production, there's a 400 bushel-per-acre difference. R. E. Wagner of the Potash/Phosphate Institute says this difference is the world's greatest resource. Certainly this latent 400 bushel-per-acre cushion is comforting.

Even the top realized yields fall at least 150 bushels short of the maximum. Everyone has a lot to learn in attempting to tap this valuable food resource.

Experts suggest that world food production must increase by 60 percent in order to feed the projected population in the year 2000. That's only 20 years from now, and even the encouraging upward corn yield trend is not enough to do the job.

Today's hybrids have already demonstrated that corn yields of over 300 bushels per acre can be achieved. Thanks to plant

breeding advances, genetics aren't the limiting factor.

Today's technology is unable to prescribe how to consistently produce 200-bushel yields. Here is where research and experimentation must apply tremendous pressure. Farmers can do a great deal to lift the nation's average yield by adopting better fertilizer practices, better pest control, higher populations and more timely operations. Those farmers presently doubling the average production for their site or community are already using these

techniques effectively.

In recent years, several university and agribusiness groups have started working with individual top farmers to learn how to produce field-scale 300-bushel corn yields with some consistency. That's a much needed activity. In addition, everyone concerned with eating needs to provide strong support to both public and private research efforts aimed at unlocking more of the secrets of crop production. Time will tell all people involved in agriculture if they were successful.



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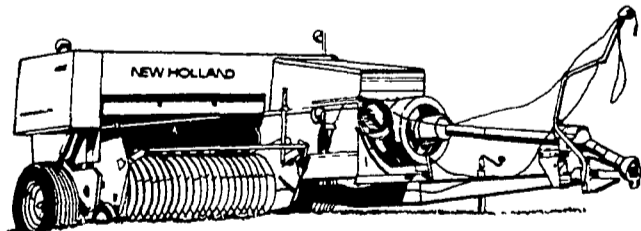
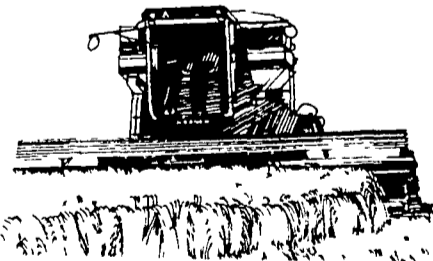
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