

FINCEL'S SWEET CORN REVISITED

BY RICH BELMONT



Frank Fincel (pronounced FIN-cel) began farming in 1886 on 5 acres in the north end of Dubuque by the John Deere factory. A couple of years later his wife was selling sweet corn from a roadside stand. Little did he know that little stand would grow into a very successful business still growing 130 years later.

The current owner, Frank IV, runs a classic family business. It was started by his great grandmother and continued by his grandfather and father, Franks II and III. Frank IV has been growing corn over 56 years now! Today the farm is operated by himself, his wife, Carol, and his sons Frank V and Craig. Frank V's wife, Sarah manages the East Dubuque stand and Craig's wife, Kayleigh Weber-Fincel, is involved in many aspects of the farm. Frank and Sarah's son, Frank VI, is on the picking crew so he is the 6th generation Fincel in the family business.

During the growing season most of these family members work 13 to 15 hour days, 7 days per week. The farm consists of 100 acres and is located in East Dubuque, IL right along State Highway 20. You can see some of the fields under the Frentress Lake water tower. There are 70 acres planted in corn and the other 30 are producing 40 other types of produce. Everything Fincel's sells is grown in East Dubuque except peaches.

The farm now employs 48 people including 18 in the picking crew. Corn can be purchased at either of the Fincel's Market Stands, Dubuque Farmers' Market Saturdays, and at several local grocery stores including Hy-Vee and Tammy's Piggly Wiggly in Galena, IL.



Fincel's corn season starts approximately July 4th and ends late September or early October. There are 35 separate plantings spaced so a new field of sweet corn is available for picking every

3 to 4 days. This year the first planting was April 13th and the first corn was sold on July 6th.

Fincel's reputation for the best sweet corn is known throughout the tri-states. And that reputation was not achieved by accident. Every year seed company representatives offer them between 20 and 30 new corn hybrid varieties to test. They try about 16 experimental corn varieties each season always looking for improvements in yield, flavor and higher sugar content. No genetically modified seeds are used and fortunately there are no other corn growers within a quarter mile of their fields. This means they do not have to be concerned with cross wind pollination from other varieties. Their experience has taught them to always use bi-color corn since it provides a consistently tender and sweet taste.

A typical day at the farm begins with the picking crew harvesting the day's crop starting at first light between 5 and 5:30 am. Automatic corn pickers are not used. The absence of machines permits the crew to feel each ear and discard blemished ones. The corn is picked every day rain or shine. It is only sold on the day it is picked. At close of business all unsold corn is gathered up and donated to local food pantries and charitable organizations including the Dubuque Rescue Mission, the Tri-States Independent Blind Society, and Camp Albrecht Acres.



Frank recommends purchasing corn the day it is going to be consumed. Otherwise its natural sugar begins to turn to starch. Do not leave it in a hot car. Corn should be stored in the husks in the refrigerator. If you intend to keep it for more than 3 to 4 days the best storing option is to freeze it.

At the Market Stands, Carol and her staff are frequently answering questions regarding the cooking, freezing, storing and shipping of corn. Here are some of their recommendations:

COOKING

- Boiling is the preferred method of cooking
- Bring water to boil in a large enough pot to allow for the placing of all corn under water
- While the water is reaching boiling temperature remove the husks from the ears. (Fun Fact: water boils at 100°C or 212°F at one atmosphere of pressure which is sea level)
- Place ears in boiling water
- Time for six minutes after water returns to full rolling boil
- Remove ears from pot and enjoy

FREEZING

- Remove ears from husks
- Blanch ears in boiling water for two minutes
- Remove from boiling water and plunge in ice water until cool
- Place on towel and let dry
- Cut kernels off of the cobs. Corn should not be frozen on the cob because the cob draws moisture from the kernels
- Store in freezer bags in freezer

SHIPPING

- Ship corn in husks but first pop off by hand the shank from each ear
- Ship in containers with cold packs
- Ship Next Day Delivery only

More tips for grilling, roasting, steaming, storing, freezing, transporting and shipping are available on the website: www.FincelsSweetCorn.com.

Besides corn there are approximately 40 other crops from Fincel's farm. Planning starts in January and some seeds are started in Frank and Carol's kitchen in February.

The selling cycle begins in May. Spring time brings hanging flower baskets, cherry tomato baskets and bedding plants. Then comes asparagus, the first vegetable of the season. Soon thereafter come sugar snap peas and pea pods. Strawberries are available only during the month of June.

After corn Fincel's most popular crop is tomatoes. They have over 5,000 tomato plants. Some are grown both at the beginning and end of their season in greenhouses. They are field grown all summer. Greenhouse tomatoes come on the market in mid-June and field fresh tomatoes in mid-July. Fincel's tomatoes are never allowed to touch the ground. They are elevated with the Florida Stake and Weave System. This means a stake is placed next to every other plant and twine is weaved through the branches to keep them from drooping.

Tomatoes are picked every other day and only in quantities sufficient for two days sales so peak flavor is maintained. This is why tomatoes are sometimes sold out by late afternoon. It is best to store farm fresh tomatoes on a counter at room temperature. The flavor of tomatoes starts to deteriorate when ambient temperature falls below 54°F. (Fun Fact: Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable? Technically it is a fruit because it contains the seeds of the tomato plant. However, in 1893 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it's a vegetable because most people considered it to be a vegetable even though it is really a fruit. The tomato is the "State Vegetable" of New Jersey and the "State Fruit" of Arkansas).



During the peak summer months you will typically find Fincel's Markets offering the following fruits and vegetables: Corn, tomatoes, musk melons, cucumbers, zucchini, green and red bell peppers, green and red cabbage, green and yellow beans, summer squash, beets, kohlrabi, dill, pickling



cucumbers, Norland red and Yukon Gold potatoes, red and white candy onions, kale, broccoli, seeded and seedless watermelon, and seven varieties of hot peppers.

The fall crop season arrives in September and October. This is the time to stock up on pumpkins, gourds and spaghetti, buttercup, acorn and butternut squash.



Fincel's Sweet Corn is so popular with local foodies there are currently 9,291 "Likes" on their Facebook page! Maybe that also explains why their mugs, hats, t-shirts, water bottles, sweatshirts and gift certificates are all best sellers! Purchase yours at the East Side Market and at www.FincelsSweetCorn.com.

Frank wants to take this opportunity to thank all his loyal customers for their support every year. He would also like to dispel a few persistent rumors. All of Fincel's produce is grown in East Dubuque, IL. There are no Fincel farms in Alabama, Arkansas or Missouri. The tomatoes are not trucked in from elsewhere and neither are the musk melons. They do not come from Muscatine!

The Fincel family is devoted, maybe even obsessed, with making sure your family has fresh corn and vegetables on the dinner table. Ironically, they themselves have no time for family dinners between May and October. As Frank likes to say his produce keeps on growing. It has no respect for week-ends and holidays!



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550 W. KROLL RD., EAST DUBUQUE, IL 61025

FINCELSSWEETCORN.COM

FACEBOOK.COM/FINCELSSWEETCORN

Locations and Hours*

Dubuque Farmers Market
Iowa Street at 12th Street (May–October)
Saturdays: 7 AM–Noon

Fincel's West Side Market
Independent Tri-State Blind Society Parking Lot
3333 Asbury Road, Dubuque, IA
Mon–Fri: 8 AM–5 PM
Sat–Sun: 9 AM–5 PM

Fincel's East Side Market
Van's Liquor Store Lower Parking Lot
Wall Street off Sinsinawa Avenue, East Dubuque, IL
Daily: 9 AM–5 PM

*Closing times may be earlier if the day's produce is sold out

Pay Options: Cash or Check, Snap Money Market Tokens are accepted at the Dubuque Farmers' Market on Saturdays