



## Why Masters Choice? By Daniel Olson

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Sometimes you just get lucky. As you probably know, Byron Seeds is an independent research and marketing company in the area of forages and how they affect your livestock. We have become the largest “high-energy” forage seed company in the Midwest by being “cutting edge” and futuristic when it comes to trends in agriculture. We would like to think that this is because we are farmers too and that gives us an inside track on determining the needs of farmers, but... sometimes we just get lucky. Masters Choice is a perfect example of this!

The Masters Choice story starts in the late 70's when a plant breeder named John Rucker had this unique idea of what he wanted a corn plant to look like. This was before corn silage was as popular as it is today and insect traits were not even an option. John wanted a grain corn plant that was naturally insect tolerant and one that had enough plant health to withstand drought and disease. John succeeded and the “Master Farmer” corn lineup was built. [This soon became “Masters Choice” when the owners of RBA Seeds tragically died in a plane crash and the father and widows choose to allow John to buy Master Farmer division]. Back to the corn story, there was a catch though, (isn't there always!) John's secret to getting these benefits was that he bred higher sugar levels into these corn plants. These plants retained that sugar later into their maturity than other corn hybrids. This sugar did great things for plant health but kept the kernels soft and lowered bushel weight. Unfortunately for John, the industry at that time was heading the opposite way –toward higher bushel weights and flintier corn due to the amount of corn that was being exported to China and Russia at the time. Advanced starch availability testing was not even thought of and no one knew about the advantages of floury starch. John's corn didn't sell very well.

Well, John believed in his product and continued to work on it for the next 20 some years. That was when Lyn Crabtree, a Dairy Nutritionist and a Byron Seed dealer who was working with Byron's tested some Masters Choice corn silage on one of his dairies. This silage fed better than anything he had ever seen. He contacted John to find out what made his corn unique ... and Byron Seed got acquainted with Masters Choice Hybrids.

What we found was an incredible silage corn that both yielded and had amazing quality. We found corn that produced more sugar than was needed to make the corn grain and retained its plant sugar longer than other hybrids and because of this and the extra stalk density that the sugar enabled, we found silage that fermented quicker. We have found that John was right about natural insect resistance and drought tolerance and we have found that the need for fungicides and corn processors decrease with Master's Choice hybrids.

We found other unintended consequences with Masters Choice Hybrids including the softer corn kernels which are recognized as being more available to the cow and is especially important as the price of a bushel of corn has skyrocketed. We also found Masters Choice retains an old-fashion trait of “flex.” This allows a lower population planting but still retains the yield to compete with (and beat) today's “big corn company” hybrids as both the stalks and the ears flex. We found that it takes fewer bags of corn purchased to plant the same acres. Many farmers have found long ears exceeding 20 rows! We have found many of our MC corn silage and HM corn hybrids will produce a white or pink cob with higher digestibility of the cob, also.

We have seen Masters Choice win silage plots from Pennsylvania to Minnesota. We have seen it yield than Pioneer, stand better than DeKalb and have more “milk per ton ” than Mycogen's BMR.

We have heard from farmers telling us that they can now feed less corn if that grain is a Masters Choice floury hybrid. We have heard from farmers telling about increased milk production and components and how Masters Choice has helped them become more profitable. And we hear back from more of those farmers every year wanting to order more Master's Choice corn seed for their farms.

Behind every success are some people with talent, inspiration and perseverance. But sometimes it doesn't hurt to get lucky, too!

