

Merschman Seeds, Inc.

Ever-evolving company seeks connection with its seeds



Merschman Seeds, West Point, IA, features a processing plant on the left, maintenance building in the center, and office on the right. (Merschman Seeds photo)



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Key Personnel

- Joe Merschman, president/CEO
- Bill Merschman, board chairman

Company Profile

- Primary products: soybeans (LibertyLink and soon Balance GT and Enlist E3), corn (distributor of Stine corn), wheat (soft red winter), and alfalfa (distributor of America's Alfalfa).
- Service territory: Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Nebraska, Kansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas.
- Family owned.
- Established 1954.

Merschman Seeds, Inc. is a seed company that has long embraced change.

Since 1957, the company has operated a seed plant in West Point, IA, where President/CEO Joe Merschman says being willing to change has helped lead to the continued development of the business.

Over the years, change has meant anything from offering new products to finding ways to utilize the latest technology.

At its core, the mentality meant that Joe's father and company founder, Bill Merschman, would never take the same roads up and back from industry meetings in other parts of the state.

"He wanted change," Merschman says. "We are always looking for better soybean varieties and corn hybrids, better seed treatments, and innovative ways to package and deliver our seeds."

Through it all, one thing has remained the same for the business, as it

has maintained a farmer first mentality. That way of thinking is made clear through its long-running slogan, "Your friend in the field."

Role of Technology

Merschman's primary goal is to make no substitutions in terms of the product that is delivered to the customer.

In other words, he says, the company strives to ensure the exact variety of seed a customer orders is what they receive.

In an effort to make this goal possible, Merschman began working with technology firm DPS, Inc., Carmel, IN (317-574-4300), to develop a software package the company could run in real time mode.

"We were looking to the future with technology as a limiting factor and said 'we've got to do something with the software,'" Merschman says. "It has been a tremendous help to run our business. We have eliminated variety substitutions completely in our company. In addition, we can measure productivity along the way; always striving to do things better."

Judy Arnold, president of DPS, is enthusiastic about their solution, DPS Seed.

"Like any competitive industry, seed distributors face challenges," Arnold says.



Joe Merschman points at some of the historic Merschman Seeds logos displayed in the lobby of the company's West Point, IA, office. (Chris Lusvardi photo)

“We are trying to be consistent. We have a really intimate connection with our seed.”

*Joe Merschman
Merschman Seeds President
West Point, IA*

“They must address those challenges or face the consequences,” Arnold says. “What DPS Seed can do for seed distributors is help them achieve their desire of surviving and thriving on their own terms in this competitive environment.”

Arnold notes that, among other benefits, DPS Seed can help seed distributors increase the accuracy of their inventory management and licensing compliancy, reduce paperwork, and improve customer service.

“Where some companies implement software to just perform a function, forward thinking companies use software to improve competitiveness,” Arnold says. “It’s the difference between getting by and getting going. DPS is here to help seed distributors get going.”

Using a system of barcodes, Merschman says their products are scanned at various points in the production process, from the moment the seed enters the plant to when it is delivered



Merschman Seeds utilizes a bar code system with areas marked off on the ceiling of its warehouse as a way to more effectively track products. (Chris Lusvardi photos)

to a customer.

He says they want to eliminate surprises and mistakes, with nearly 2,500 combinations of seed products that can be offered.

“Every movement is recorded,” Merschman says. “We’re trying to be consistent. We have a really intimate connection with our seed.”

The Merschman Easy Order System enables customers to order like consumers would on other websites such as

Amazon.com.

“We know what we have available to sell and exactly where it is located in the warehouse,” Merschman says. “Our entire company from production, shipping, and accounting is connected in a comprehensive software system, in real time.”

The new tracking system was launched in 2014 and Merschman says it wasn’t widely accepted at first.

“One of the hardest things that was done was adapting to it,” he recalls. “It totally changed our culture.”

Offering New Products

Change is further evident in the products Merschman Seeds sells.

Merschman says the company started in 1954 as an oat business, which remained a part of its fabric for many years until they came to the realization oats no longer needed to be part of the business.

A major change was announced in April when Merschman received notice from Monsanto that its licenses of Monsanto products would not be renewed.

Merschman Seeds has been producing seed using Monsanto traits for 21 years. Sales of Monsanto-based products, including RoundUp Ready ▶



Left, Brian Moeller points a scanner at a soybean seed box while demonstrating how a system developed by DPS Seed is used.

Right, Moeller shows the display of the scanner, which is used to track seed throughout the warehouse until it is delivered to a customer.



Merschman Seeds delivery drivers take pride in using Western Star trucks, part of an image Joe Merschman wants to project of the company. (Merschman Seeds photo)

resistant seeds, have steadily declined for Merschman Seeds, Merschman says.

Other brands that the company carries, he says, including LibertyLink from Bayer, have increased with its service territory spanning across parts of the Midwest and Mid-South.

“Our sales of LibertyLink soybeans started jumping a few years ago in the southern states and have increased every year as the weed resistance issue has migrated north,” Merschman says. “Farmers need a product that works. As an independent company, it has always been our policy to provide multiple solutions and to recommend the ones that work best.”

Merschman says the company will soon begin offering Balance GT and Enlist E3 soybean traits, pending final registrations.

Nearly 50 companies have signed on as licensees in preparation to offer the Balance GT Soybean Performance System through MS Technologies, a partnership between Merschman Seeds and Stine Seeds, Adel, IA.

In upcoming years, Balance GT is expected to evolve into a triple-stacked herbicide-tolerant soybean, Balance GTLL, providing tolerance to glyphosate, Balance Bean, and Liberty herbicides.

In addition, Merschman Seeds announced in March that it will be distributing and marketing Stine Corn exclusively in 2018.

The new offerings are all part of the Merschman Seeds’ continuing evolution, Merschman says.

“We strive to get better every day looking for change and ways to improve,” explains Merschman, who has been working full-time for the company for 40 years while doing almost every job within it.

He started working in the business at age 12 after school.

His father, Bill, has long said, “Seedsmen are born, not made.” Joe says that refers to the passion seedsmen have to produce the perfect seed.

Bill remains chairman of the board, maintaining an office and coming into work almost every day, along with his wife, Bernice.

Joe says his father has never taken more than a few days of vacation at a time.

Commitment to Quality

Merschman notes the company pays particular attention to the way in which products are delivered to the customer. He wants to make sure the image of the business is represented well at all times.

“We own our own delivery equipment so our seed is handled carefully and delivered on time in clean trucks to reflect our seed,” Merschman says. “Our sales people are constantly being trained on the latest innovations in seed and we instill a culture that we care about our customers.”

Delivery drivers use Western Star trucks, which they take extra care to power wash as often as possible.

“At the end of the day, it’s a distinguishing factor,” Merschman says. “We’ve invested a lot to keep our employees happy and they’ve responded well to it.”

Your Friend in the Field

Caring for its customers is something that has been a part of the Merschman Seeds culture throughout its 63 years.

While other parts of the business have changed, it’s used the “Your friend in the field” slogan since the 1980’s.

“We consider change good,” Merschman says. “It creates opportunities to look to the future and try new products.”

Despite the ability to change, Merschman says maintaining a connection with customers is one of the most important parts of being successful, something which he hopes the slogan continues to signify.

Chris Lusvardi, editor

Merschman Seeds Mission

Merschman Seeds’ success is based on putting the farmer first by offering superior seed products, best in class service, and the most innovative management practices.



Bags of seed are wrapped to be stored in the Merschman Seeds warehouse until being loaded onto trucks for delivery throughout the Midwest and Mid-South.