



SEEDING IDEAS.  
SINCE 1911

## Joe Rucker, Crookham Company Caldwell, Idaho

Whether or not you've heard of the Crookham Company, there's a very good chance that you've enjoyed the corn varieties they've developed. 'Bodacious', 'Incredible', and 'Ambrosia' are some of the company's aptly named sugary and sugary enhanced sweet corns from the 1970s and 1980s. More current favorites are 'Nirvana', an augmented supersweet variety, known for its extraordinary juicy crunch and 'Temptress', a quad sweet favored by organic growers. Crookham also breeds onions, as the company hails from one of the largest onion growing regions in the world—southwestern Idaho.

But, in fact, popcorn is what launched the company in 1907. The company has one of the largest popcorn seed banks in the world, and produces all shades of popcorn and eye-catching novelty corn.

Owned by the Crookham family since 1911, the company prides itself on "Seeding Ideas." Having a world-class sweet corn seed bank is a definite advantage when it comes to breeding, and new, exciting, and dependable hybrids are the company's hallmark. "Our priority is producing high quality seed," explains Joe Rucker, who represents the company in the eastern part of the country. "We want the best start possible for our customers, whether they grow for a roadside stand or on a large commercial scale." Due to its large international market and seed bank, the company's breeding program does not involve any genetic engineering.



**Crookham Co. hosted an HGSA field day in 2012. In front: Company CEO George Crookham, left, and Joe Rucker, right.**

**Joe Rucker is one of about 150 people employed by the Idaho-based company year round.** During the growing season the staff swells, with over 400 seasonal employees participating in the hands-on aspects of creating high quality hybrid seed. To view one fascinating aspect, watch the sweet corn detasseling video on the Company's web site.

Much of the seed production occurs near the company's headquarters. "The Treasure Valley, Idaho is one of the most unique areas of the world," says Joe. "Crookham was one of the first companies to settle here and has benefited from the mild weather, an abundance of water and a long, temperate fall, which helps the seed 'set' in the field." Seed from this region currently ships to every continent in the world except Antarctica.



**'Tempress' was the first Quad Sweet corn produced by Crookham Co. A dependable plant that combines heirloom corn taste with modern sweetness, it has gotten an enthusiastic response.**

**Joe and his wife Annie both graduated from Penn State University.** After a time managing an apple orchard in Pennsylvania, Joe joined Abbott & Cobb, a vegetable seed company headquartered in Pennsylvania, where he sold directly to farmers. And so his lifelong career in the seed business began. He worked for a large international company for a time and then moved to Crookham, where he has managed east coast sales for seven years. Meanwhile, Annie pursued a career in entomology. The Rucker family—Joe, Annie, and their two grown children—have remained on the east coast throughout Joe's many years in the seed business. Annie now works at the Rutgers Agricultural Research Center, where her expertise has been an advantage to Joe. "I bring insects home for her to identify. I'll bet I know more about the insects on our crops than any other salesman," he laughs.

Despite all his travel, Joe finds time to maintain a community garden plot. He and his son Zeke grew 16 varieties of heirloom tomatoes this year. "Our favorite is Aunt Ruby's German Green," he reports. Another favorite activity: "I enjoy reading a good book on the Cape May beach."

**"I love what I do," says Joe.** "I value the relationships I've built with farmers and seed companies over the years, and I enjoy travel. I get to see agriculture in different parts of the country, and learn about the different cultural practices. I've always loved adventure, and this business is full of it!"



**In addition to sweet corn, Crookham is known for its onions and popcorn. Shown here: 'Scout' hybrid onion and decorative 'Strawberry' popcorn.**