

## **George Kurtzweil (1884-1961):**

George Kurtzweil came from a family rich in agricultural heritage. The family raised corn for several years in Iowa, but eventually did research on other vegetables they could grow as seed crops. Eventually, Kurtzweil's father, Mathias, founded the Iowa Seed Company, and George served as corporate secretary. For many years, the company was the largest mail order seed company in the Midwest.

In 1905 the Kurtzweil family purchased a forty acre farm on the north side of Altoona. Their plan was to use the land for experimentation and crop development. Several years later, another three acres was purchased bordering the south side of the farm.

Henry A. Wallace, U. S. Vice President under President Franklin Roosevelt and U. S. Secretary of Agriculture under President Harry Truman, was a good friend of George Kurtzweil. When the 1923 corn yield test was organized at Iowa State University, Wallace and Kurtzweil went to see what it was about. The two men were convinced that hybrid seed corn was the way of the future.

Wallace and Kurtzweil picked Copper Cross as the type of hybrid corn they would enter in the corn yield test trials. They reasoned that the distinctive color of the variety would distinguish it from other corn and make comparisons more accurate.

George Kurtzweil carefully produced the nation's first commercial hybrid seed corn on a single acre of his father's farm well isolated from other corn. The field was located near the 100 Block of First Avenue North in Altoona. Great care was taken in detasseling the corn. During the summer of 1923, Kurtzweil's sister, Ruth, distinguished herself as the person who single-handedly detasseled all of the commercial hybrid corn produced in Iowa.

While Copper Cross didn't win the 1923 yield test, Kurtzweil was convinced he could sell the seed. That year George Kurtzweil and Henry Wallace signed a contract---the first contract for hybrid seed corn ever written. The contract gave Kurtzweil exclusive rights to grow and sell the corn in exchange for a royalty paid to Wallace.

In 1926 George Kurtzweil went on to become one of the founders of Hi-Bred Corn Company, now called Pioneer Hy-bred International, Inc. He is recognized as a pioneer in American agriculture.

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