

you're not an iowan unless ...

YOU'VE EATEN YOUR
WEIGHT IN SWEET CORN



Missy Keenan is a freelance writer, editor, and user experience consultant living in Des Moines. When she's not improving websites, writing copy for corporate clients, or eating her weight in sweet corn, Missy writes for the Register on food, health, and local personalities. You can read about Missy and her work at www.missykeenan.com.

Ask anyone from the coasts what Iowa is known for. If they don't get it completely wrong and guess potatoes, they'll likely say corn.

We Iowans can get bent out of shape when folks from other areas of the country think of us as country hicks. But sweet corn is something I'm happy to be associated with.

When I was a kid, I was a frequent visitor to my grandparents' farm outside of Stanhope. Their yard was surrounded by feed corn, but the first couple rows near the house were always sweet corn.

I spent many warm summer late afternoons on my grandparents' back porch shucking ear after ear of sweet corn. I still remember the squeak of the husks, the pesky silks clinging to my hands and piling up on my bare feet, my disgust at a rotten ear or errant bug. I'm sure I complained back then, but shucking corn at their farm holds a fond spot in my memory bank now. Shucking corn is always kids' work in my family, and now my son is the one complaining.

Come summer, former Iowans don't miss the mosquitoes or the humidity, but they do long for Iowa sweet corn. My sister moved away to Oregon and loves the crop biodiversity there. Her new home state grows delicious strawberries, pears, hazelnuts and wine grapes, but nobody does sweet corn or tomatoes like we do.

When Missouri corn shows up at the farmers' market in early June, I just walk on by. And I consider wintertime shrink-wrapped corn on the cob from the freezer case an abomination. But show me a truck load of fresh-picked Iowa sweet corn on the side of the road, and I'll slam on the brakes every time.

This time of year you'll find great dishes featuring corn at lots of Iowa restaurants. I love a creamy corn chowder, tacos with corn relish, and corn in citified recipes paired with arugula or goat cheese.

But during those precious few weeks of late summer when sweet corn and tomatoes are at their best, the meal I'm most interested in is a BLT and a couple of ears of corn.

My husband cuts his corn off the cob because he doesn't like getting it stuck in his teeth. But for me, gnawing the corn straight from the cob is an essential part of the experience. A fresh ear of corn slathered in real butter (no margarine for me, please) and generous amounts of salt and pepper. Nothing says Iowa perfection more than that.



Missy Keenan's son and niece shucked corn on the front steps of the Keenan residence last summer.

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