

Storms Threaten 2018 Indiana State Husking Event

Early husking contests drew a crowd of thousands when a majority of Americans lived on farms. Because families worked together to harvest corn by hand, it was in the cornfield that children experienced a sense of accomplishment from hard work and developed a strong work ethic. Husking contests ended during the war years but were revived again in 1926. Corn husking events preserve the tradition and history of farming that has been lost due to growing technology and quickly vanishing small family farms. These contests provide wholesome family fun.

Many wondered on the morning of Saturday, October 6th, if there would be a 2018 Indiana State Corn Husking Contest at the Craig Geyer Farm in Bremen, IN. The same storm front that caused Illinois officials to cancel their event was taking aim at northern Indiana.

There was a flurry of activity in the weeks prior to the contest. Bang board wagons were assembled and the field had been cut into lands or sections for husking by the contestants. Tents had been secured for strong winds and an emergency plan was in place. Post war corn pickers, corn-related equipment, and a growing collection of restored vintage farm tractors found their place in the field to be displayed for all to enjoy.

Field conditions were less than ideal for Saturday's event. The field had been wet and muddied from heavy rain the day and night before and an imminent threat of severe weather now loomed over the contest. Still, over 200 farmers, competitors, and spectators from all over Indiana came to watch nearly 60 huskers compete for "bragging rights." The youngest husker was Kane Finke, 10 years old and the eldest, Dale Boggs, was 88. Handicapped huskers also competed this year. Indiana would send its top huskers to compete at the National contest in Flandreau, South Dakota on October 20th & 21st.

Several teams of horses traveled through heavy storms to get to the contest. Because of the increased stress on the horses, all but two teams returned home and five of the vintage tractors went to work pulling wagons. When there was a break in the heavy weather, competitors were quick to move into the field to take their turn husking corn.

A severe storm watch was issued as the contest neared its end. The team competition was ending as a more intense afternoon storm approached. The skies grew ominous as the final husker, Brent Reed of Nappanee, began husking. Then heavy rain began and he husked during torrential, blinding and blowing rain. He returned to the scales with water pouring out of the wagon. Husks were wrung out by hand before weighing to calculate for deductions as the flooding rain flowed through the tent where huskers had taken shelter awaiting results. When the storm front passed, nearly 4 inches of rain had fallen. Those who remained talked about the weather, reviewed the results while enjoying complimentary homemade ice cream.

The Vern Dowdy family honored his passing by offering three scholarships to new huskers. This contest was made memorable by the weather, but also the people who competed. Vern had husked corn for seventeen years in Indiana and was very active in the Indiana Cornhusking Association. Lewis Fox was a first time husker. He traveled from Frankfort with his friend, John Nichols, from Noblesville so that Lewis could cross husking corn off of his bucket list. Everyone who attended returned home with memories to hold and stories to tell about the contest.