

Ginger Grubb calls her 90-year-old father, Dean Doonan, a "pop-corn-aholic." So when the Montezuma native married her husband, Bill, and moved to his family's fifth-generation farm outside of Barnes City, she wasn't surprised by a request from her dad.

"He said, 'If I find good seed for popcorn, could you grow a little bit?' He wanted some for home use and to share with friends," she says.

Bill agreed to help ("How could I say no?" he laughs), and set aside space for a few rows of popcorn.

"Dad and a friend and I would plant it and pick it by hand and run it through a sheller, so we always had some around," Ginger says.

Over the years, they shared samples with friends. Soon, the Grubbs started growing popcorn that was sold at local little league games. The venture remained a hobby, until Ginger's high school friend, Patti Collins, moved back to Iowa from Colorado. As she and her partner, Margi Constantino, snacked on popcorn during a visit to the Grubb farm, they suggested that the couple sell on a larger scale.

Eventually, the four friends launched a business together. Today, Grubb's Premium Popping Corn is headquartered in a 1910 peg-and-timber barn on the farm that has been in the Grubb family since 1874. Bill grew up in the house there, but he wasn't always sure that he'd take over from his father. It wasn't until he was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1966, and missed home during his time away, that he decided to follow in the family tradition.

After he returned and married Ginger, they moved to his family's other century farm, which has been worked by several generations on his mother's side. Thirty years later, when his parents retired and moved to Pella, Bill and Ginger moved into the house where he grew up. He currently finishes cattle and raises corn, soybeans and hay on both properties.

"I've been working on this farm all my life. My father taught me what he knew and I'm carrying on the heritage, I guess," Bill says. "It's quite an honor."

When Ginger and her friends asked to plant some extra acres of popcorn, Bill was happy to dedicate land to the venture. They planted eight acres during the first year of business, and sold enough from the start to cover that year's purchasing and planting expenses. The following year, they expanded to 20 acres of popcorn. By year three, they planted 40 acres, and things have grown from there.

"It just seems like it was meant to be," Ginger says.

The popcorn business, like the land it calls home, has become a family affair. After purchasing, planting and raising seed, the Grubbs drive the harvested kernels across Iowa to Snappy Popcorn Company in Breda. Employees there clean and package the popcorn, putting some into microwaveable bags and pouring additional loose kernels into 50-pound sacks. Back at the farm, the Bill and Ginger's adult daughters, Deanna and Samantha, join other family members and friends who help fill 2.25-pound pouches to sell in stores.

Shoppers can choose from three kinds of Grubb's Premium Popping Corn. Microwave bags come three to a box or in cases of 12 boxes, and traditional butterfly kernels sell in 2.25-pound or five-pound bags. The company also offers mushroom popcorn, which produces bigger, meatier kernels when popped.

While the butterfly popcorn works on the stovetop or in an air popper, the mushroom variety works best on the stove or in a kettle. The Grubbs mix the two kinds of kernels in a hand-cranked Whirley Pop, and Ginger recommends cooking with coconut oil for best results.

"You want to use coconut oil when you pop on the stove, because it has the highest heat ratio," she says. "Heat the pan with the oil and

one kernel. When that one pops, put your popcorn in and start stirring. You'll have a pan full of popcorn in about the same amount of time as you would with the microwave."

While website customers have popcorn shipped to all parts of the country (one retired local schoolteacher has even taken bags on his trips to Antarctica), the products have been a hit locally, as well.

Kelsi Chambers and her husband, Todd, purchase popcorn directly from the Grubb family. The Knoxville residents like supporting small, local businesses, and they enjoy the fresh taste of both the loose kernels and the microwave popcorn. Chambers also appreciates having a healthy option for her nine-year-old daughter.

"It is important to know where our food comes from," she says. "In these days of too much processed food in our grocery stores, it is nice to have a popcorn option we feel is raised right and is clean to eat."

The popcorn is a big seller at several central Iowa grocery chains and independent markets, too.

"We've carried it for two or three years. Our customers really enjoy it and we sell a lot of it," says Nathan Nelson, assistant grocery manager at Fareway in Oskaloosa. Shopper feedback suggests the quality and reasonable price play a role in the brand's popularity, as does the local connection. The store publicizes the product with signs highlighting that Grubb's Premium Popping Corn is Iowa-grown and family-owned.

At Peace Tree Brewing Co. in Knoxville, Grubb's microwave popcorn is featured on a snack menu that also includes local cheese and meat. Brewery co-founder Megan McKay first learned about the product through Bill and Ginger's son-in-law, Joel Arkema, who works part-time in the taproom. Offering the popcorn reinforces McKay's commitment to promoting local producers.

"People always get excited when they find out that it not only tastes really great, but that it also is local and that a family member is one of our bartenders," she says, adding that she buys popcorn to enjoy at home, as well. "It provides lots of good warm feelings all around."

Giving back to the community that supports them is important to Bill and Ginger Grubb. They donate popcorn to nursing homes and area food pantries, and they also provide low-cost product that students can sell for school fundraisers.

"It's just nice to be able to give things away. It doesn't cost us a lot to give, and it brings smiles to people's faces," Ginger says. "Everybody loves popcorn."





# POPCORN!

To order Grubb's Premium Popping Corn, or to view a list of local stores that carry the products, visit [GrubbPopcorn.com](http://GrubbPopcorn.com).

## Kettle Corn

1/2 cup Grubb's Premium Mushroom Popping Corn  
1/4 cup white sugar  
2 tablespoons corn or canola oil

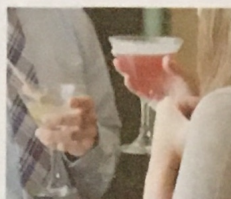
Heat oil in a Whirley Pop or other stovetop popper on medium heat. Once the oil is hot, stir in the sugar and Grubb's Premium Mushroom Popping Corn. Shake the pot constantly to keep the sugar from burning. Once the popping has slowed to once every two to three seconds, remove the popper from the heat. Continue to shake for a minute until the popping has stopped. Pour popcorn into a large bowl and allow it to cool, stirring occasionally to break up large clumps.

## Caramel Popcorn

1-2 batches of Grubb's Premium Popping Corn (popped according to package directions)  
1 cup brown sugar  
1 stick of butter  
1/4 cup milk

Pop one or two batches of Grubb's Premium Popping Corn according to package directions and spread out in a cake pan or cookie sheet.

Bring brown sugar, butter and milk to a rolling boil for about five minutes, stirring frequently. Spoon boiled mixture over the popped corn and eat sticky. For a crisper treat, bake the mixture in a 350-degree oven for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.



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