

INVENTORS OF THE CORN CURL

Beloit has a long history of creating tasty snacks and is now home to several innovative food companies such as Frito-Lay, Kerry, Hormel and Kettle Foods.

It all began with the corn curl, and how it was invented in Beloit is part accident and part innovation. Clair Mathews, an agronomist for the Dougan Farm Dairies, was on a quest to create better feed for livestock, so he designed a simple machine from a farm wagon axle and wagon wheel hub and other odds and ends to create flaked feed. This experimental machine worked sufficiently enough to demonstrate that such a concept and devise would produce the flaked feed that he sought. His machine was improved upon and later Flakall Corporation was formed to produce this new style feed and a patent was received on June 7, 1938. Its first commercial product was flaked rabbit feed made from alfalfa, oats, barley, wheat, corn, oil, meals minerals, salt and molasses. Little did they know that a fluke in the production process would have a tremendous impact upon the snack food industry around the world!

One day Edward Wilson, a flake operator at the Flakall Company, watched as workers poured cracked corn kernels into one of the flaking machines to help reduce clogging of the machine and to clean the augers. The flaker had been running continuously for many hours and it was unusually hot. To the surprise of Wilson, the extruded corn sheet began to puff and pop, and when the sheet exited the machine and hit colder air and the cold cement floor, it broke into irregular stick-like ribbons.

Wilson took the unusual puffed corn ribbons home, deep fried them, salted them and shared them with family and neighbors. They were an immediate hit! Wilson dubbed his creation "Korn Kurls", a name which was later trademarked. Later cheese was applied externally during the process to improve flavor, creating the first cheese curls!

This cheesy snack became so popular, the company ran another flaker just for the production of Korn Kurls. By 1946 one of the founders of the Flakall Corporation had formed the Adams Corporation and commercialized Korn Kurls. The Frito-Lay plant in Beloit now ships truckloads of these and other tasty snacks all over the country.

Adapted from "The Origin of Extruded Snacks", by Allan W. Adams, 1976, The Snack Food Blue Book. Allan Adams was president of Adams International, Beloit, Wisconsin in 1976 and was Flakall's first salesman in its early days when still producing animal feed. [Click here to download the entire article.](#)