



COVER-UP

By Monroe S. Miller

I was looking in an old photo album the other day and paused at a picture of myself.

Vanity wasn't the reason I looked so closely at the picture. The Oliver 70 tractor I was sitting on caught my eye. The older I get, the more I like those tractors used during the time of my farm childhood.

The other interesting thing in the picture, the thing that really caught my eye, was the kind of hat I was wearing over three decades ago.

It wasn't a whole lot different from the ones I'm wearing nowadays. Back then, they were called "seed corn" hats simply because most of the seed corn dealers gave them to their customers when an order was either received or the seed delivered.

Even today, in rural communities, I am sure they are called seed corn hats, even though tractor dealers, feed mills, ag chemical companies and lots of other businesses give them to their customers. After all, the easiest way to pick a farmer out of a crowd of people is simply to look at the hat he's wearing. Generally, a lawyer or a pharmacist won't be wearing a Pioneer Seed Corn hat!

So for thirty years, I've been real interested in hats. If they were my only hobby, golf course management would still have been an excellent career choice. We are lucky because we are able to get as many free hats as farmers!

Maybe more. Among the things I like to collect—toy tractors, oldtime radios and books—are caps. My collection now exceeds six hundred, and there are no duplicates.

This collection has been accumulated over my twenty years as a golf course superintendent, and I've adhered to strict principles. I don't believe in buying hats, although swapping with another collector is acceptable. I collect only those hats that have some connection to golf course management and/or agribusiness. There isn't a single seed corn hat (literally, not figuratively) in my collection.

My prizes are the hats Jacobsen has given away at each of the twenty con-

secutive GCSAA conferences I have attended.

A true collector is usually a connoisseur of his hobby. When it comes to hats, I have a fine appreciation for the subtleties of a good garment. An understanding of the value of the shape of the crown, brim stitching, height of the front piece, art work and many other details attest to my competency as a hat collector.

Not only do I seriously collect hats but I wear them, too. Always at work, but elsewhere a lot of the time.

Always have. Good thing, too. As we are reading more and more these days, the damaged ozone layer above the earth has some holes in it. First was the one over Antarctica discovered in 1985. In January of this year, heightened levels of chlorine monoxide were measured over New England and eastern Canada. This compound is involved in ozone thinning, and scientists agree that more holes in the ozone layer may soon be found.

This should scare the hell out of us who work outdoors a lot. A thinning of the ozone will expose us to increased cancer-causing ultraviolet rays from the sun.

About the time that picture was taken of me on an Oliver 70 tractor, my Grandfather Miller was being treated for skin cancer. He was a farmer.

Today, my dad is suffering from the same disease. He spent a lot of his life as a farmer.

I'm worried as can be. Am I next? Do my genes predispose me to this terrible disease? After all, managing a golf course probably exposes a person to sunlight fully as much as farming does.

Witness another case. Vincent, who farmed his entire life before coming to work with us, has had some terrible skin cancers, some that required surgery at University Hospitals. He had a large chunk of his cheek removed a couple of years back; his smile and his speech haven't been the same since.

So it's serious business for all of us in the golf course industry. Light or fair skinned people are the most susceptible to injury from sun induced skin cancers. But UV radiation can damage all skin types, so nobody is safe.

We simply need to become more aware of the risk we are running in acquiring this disease. Steps have to be taken to minimize our exposure.

Staying out of the sun simply isn't an option for golf course managers. But there are some things we can do.

Since peak exposure hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., we can maximize our protection at those times. Wearing long sleeve shirts made from summer weight fabric can help. Using a sun screen at all times is a must.

And, for heaven's sake, cover up your head. Wear a hat to protect your face. It's even more critical for guys like me who are, ah, showing a little extra forehead (actually, a little of the back of my head shows, too!). I feel lucky I've worn a hat nearly forever.

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The subject of hats and their protection value will receive more and more attention, believe me. The hats like 99.9% of us wear—the seed corn hat, if you will—simply don't offer adequate protection from the sun and the risk of cancer. This style offers no protection for vulnerable areas like ear tips, temples and the back of the neck.

Enter the National Farm Medicine Center. Not many people realize this prestigious organization is headquartered at the Marshfield Clinic in Marshfield, Wisconsin.

So concerned were the staff members at the Center that they decided to field test eleven different hat styles with a group of farmers during the summer of 1991. Their project aimed to "identify headwear that provides adequate sun protection and is still acceptable to farmers while raising awareness of the need for better sun protection among distributors of free hats to farmers."

Substitute "golf course superintendent" for "farmer" in the mission statement and the meaning doesn't change one bit.

Both groups look for the same thing in hats: tight-fitting; cool (in the summer); protection for temples, ears, neck and lower face; suitable for a wide vari-

ety of outside work; acceptable appearance; and inexpensive.

The baseball style hat is popular exactly because it is cool and comfortable, tight-fitting and free!

The test groups ranged in age from 25 to 50 years. Eleven different hats were worn for a maximum of five days or 25 work hours during peak sun exposure in June, July and August. Temperatures during the test period ranged from 60°F to over 90°F, and the weather included hot and humid days, windy days and days with heavy rain. These hats were put to a good test.

Wearers rated each hat for comfort, practicality related to weather, practicality related to work, and acceptability related to style, color and appearance. Cost was also rated.

The test results indicate it is going to be tough to get farmers to change to hats with larger brims that will give them more sun protection. "Agrifashion" is a major factor in hat preference. Given the emphasis put on golf fashion, the story would likely be the same among golf course superintendents.

Barbara Lee, a spokeswoman for the NFMC, calls getting farmers to change hat style "a monumental task."

But it is a task that needs to be addressed, for farmers and for golf course superintendents.

The Center studied 600 farmers who attended last summer's Wisconsin Farm Progress Days and found a shocking 46 percent of them had precancerous skin lesions and that 8 percent actually had skin cancer.

Makes you wonder what the results would be if they surveyed all of us who attend the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Summer Field Day, doesn't it?

It's no surprise that the wide brimmed hats were the least practical. They either get lost in the wind or get in the way of the work.

The pith helmet was better received by the test group than I'd have thought. In addition to some of the problems other wide brimmed hats have, this one is also more costly.

I would have guessed the pith helmet to be the least acceptable in terms of fashion. Experience in my own shop is the basis of that guess.

A number of years ago one of my employees—some of you know him—had a pith helmet and wore it to work. It was radical headwear and crew members thought it was weird.

The wearer pulled a great practical joke on another crew member. When the victim found out, his revenge was taken out on the pith helmet. As a

payback, he cut the brim off entirely, leaving only a skull cap! We haven't seen a pith helmet on a head around here since.

The incident points out the difficulty in changing attitudes. And that will be the problem faced when we do change the headgear we wear on the golf course.

The NFMC figures the most workable sun-safe hat will be a variation of the baseball hat—long brim in front, shorter brim in back and flaps on the side that flip up and down.

A "perfect" cap was not identified in the study. The farmers rated a hat which was a modified baseball hat with a protective removable back flap held in place with velcro the highest. Second place fell to a lightweight mesh hat with both a front and rear brim. It is commonly called a "stalker".

I'm real anxious to wear what affords good sun protection while I'm working on the golf course.

I'm not ready, however, to walk into the pro shop looking like Sherlock Holmes or a member of the French Foreign Legion or an Arab right off the desert. The ridicule could be deafening in a building that houses the latest in golf fashion.

And if the commentary in the pro shop wouldn't do me in, the roars of laughter in my own shop would end the experiment in headgear very quickly.

There are two solutions to the problem that tradition of baseball/seed corn hats present.

The first solution would be to convince everybody who hands out free hats—from Jacobsen to John Deere—to only give out sun safe caps to their customers. You see, I'm not the only one who will only wear a free hat!

The other possible answer is to talk to a golf hero—Arnold Palmer or Jack Nicklaus or Fred Couples—and convince him to wear a sun safe hat during tournaments. It would have to be something like the stalker that would fit the needs of superintendents rather than something very cute and fashionable.

The day I see Arnie walking up the 18th at Augusta National Golf Club during the Masters wearing a stalker or Fred Couples decked out in a Kangol Spooner or Jack Nicklaus finishing his final hole in the U.S. Open wearing a pith helmet (with the optional chin strap) is the day I'll wear one on the golf course.

If a stalker was good enough for Arnie, it would be for me, too.

No matter what the golf course crew or pro shop staff thinks!

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