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Production Blog

Corn Husker Comeback: Healing Lotion Takes a Crack at Winter

1/13/2025 | 12:37 PM CST



By Pamela Smith, Crops Technology Editor

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Purchasing a new bottle of Corn Huskers Lotion stirs memories and hope that not everything changes over time. (DTN photo by Pamela Smith)

The bottle sat on a store shelf like it was still 1970. It was no longer glass, but the shape of the plastic container along with the retro yellow and green label were unmistakably Corn Huskers Lotion.

In the medicine cabinet of my youth, this lotion lined up right next to Pepto-Bismol and Mercurochrome as a tried-and-true healer. There were bottles of Corn Huskers Lotion in the hog house next to the tylosin powder. It was juttet between cracks in the barn siding just close enough to lambing pen heat lamps to keep it thawed. It lived in our farmhouse mud room where we would slather up after ditching sodden gloves. Spent bottles rolled beneath pickup seats and oozed out of glove compartments. It came as gifts in our Christmas stockings.

I hadn't thought about this soothing stuff in years, yet here it was. The snot-like gelatinous liquid gave the old familiar burp when the bottle turned upside down. The first sniff smelled like everyone I knew from back in the day, including myself.

For me, the need for Corn Huskers Lotion played out the same each winter. Freezing temps combined with the necessity to use bare hands to bring livestock into this world -- lambs, pigs, calves and an occasional kitten. Hands washed in ice-cold water at the barn hydrant would soon be exposed again as fingers wiggled into newborn mouths to encourage wobbly babies to suck and latch on to their mamas.

There were frozen water buckets to thaw and automatic waterers to fix. There were snowball fights and forts to build, hills to sled and ponds to skate. Back then, chapped and cracked winter hands weren't a matter of if, but when.

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And so, trips to the drug or farm store almost always included a Corn Huskers Lotion purchase. It was inexpensive and it worked. Unlike other cures, it wasn't oily or slick and it dried fast. Treated hands were less likely to stick to flannel chore gloves than gloppy or sticky substitutes.

I grew up believing Corn Huskers Lotion was actually made from corn. We didn't read labels back then, or question modern miracles. If we believed, we believed. We didn't google ingredients such as glycerin, SD alcohol 40-B, align, oleoyl sarconine, metylparaben, triethanolamine, cyamopsis tetragonoloba (guar) gum...

So, I was initially reluctant to ask many questions. Shouldn't I just be happy that the product still exists after all these years? Isn't glycerin made from corn? Do I really want to know if it isn't?

Curiosity is a hard thing to cure, though. And digging up answers proved even harder.

I finally learned that Corn Huskers Lotion has been around since 1919 and survived numerous ownership changes. A photo of an empty bottle online coughed up a vintage 1960-ish label indicating Warner-Lambert Pharmaceuticals ownership. That company got consumed by Pfizer in 2000. The bottle I recently purchased indicated distributorship by Bausch Health US. However, emails went unanswered, and calls were rerouted. I ultimately discovered that Bausch + Lomb currently sells Corn Huskers Lotion Heavy Duty Hand Treatment.

I couldn't find anyone to confirm if there have been formula changes along the way. The company spokesperson said there's really no website to provide history or additional information. I was informed that the product is not marketed as widely as it once was and was advised that those seeking to purchase Corn Huskers Lotion should check tractor supply stores or order through Amazon.

Perhaps my interest in all of this can be tied to a love for American poet Carl Sandburg's haunting classic aptly called "Cornhuskers." I am, after all, born of the prairie. Sandburg talks of how the land and people hold memories. Rediscovering this balm for my harvest hands has been a reassuring balm for the heart, too. Remembrances stir each time I rub it between palms after a long day's work. It is soothing and hopeful to find that a few things seemingly remain the same over time -- even hand lotion.

And if that thought is over-the-top nostalgic, this rabbit hole ends on solid ground. The order I just placed to stock up on Corn Huskers Lotion puts me well ahead of deadline for stuffing the 2025 Christmas stockings.

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