

## When Dew is on the Bean

by Dennis Payton Knight

I am without qualifications, beyond an occasional weekend over a number of years decades ago, to write about gathering produce and getting it to market. Nevertheless, with that, some research for recall refreshment, and adjectives for fertilizer, I will tell what I know of the magic of harvesting pinto beans, and where I saw it.

In the first weeks of September my wife's parents would rise at a wee hour, maybe 4 a.m., and check for dew, that precious moisture in the night air, more gentle than the softest rain. The once bushy vines, having nearly finished their life's toil of growing and nurturing the spotted beans in their charge, stubbornly had kept their roots in the earth, waiting for the triumph of harvest.

Without dew, the beans must wait another day, maybe more. But when there is dew, it brings the tough resilience to the pods necessary to hold them together in their fragility. Cutting begins before dawn. A tractor has been set up with implements to lift the plants as gently as a tractor can, cut them off at the ground, and leave them still in the rows they shared through their life cycle, about ninety days, from bean to bean.

A second tractor follows, a few rows behind, gathering the still dewy beanstalks together in larger windrows. bulkier to give protection to the pods from the wind, lest they shake open and spill their beans on the ground, out of reach of the combine and forever lost to the harvest.

When the day of exact readiness in the piles is reached, and always after lunch to assure even more dryness, the farmer drives the thresher over the windrows, lifting them onto screens rattling and shaking to separate the beans from the pods, conveying the beans into a hopper, and dropping the discarded straw to the ground. A good threshing machine with good screens makes for cleaner loads and a better price.

My personal contribution to the bean harvest was to drive a truck alongside the thresher to allow it to empty its hopper and keep on threshing. When the truck was full, I would drive the load to the elevator to be weighed, stored and eventually sold, with the elevator company as the agent.

You wonder as you drive how many beans, counted one by one, might be in that load behind you. And aren't we lucky beans are measured by the cup and not by the each when we make frijoles? Leaving bean-counters behind counting anything but beans, and getting out on the farm lets you appreciate how we really get our food.

Silly thoughts then give way to deeper reflection, and you realize what you are beholding in the presence of every single bean in that truckload. It is the fragile bounty that nature and man, the farm and the farmer, the elements, sunny days and, just in time, cool, dewy nights, have together accomplished.