Drive thru the Midwest for any length of time and you’ll eventually see corn — acres and acres and acres of it. If you’re not from a rural community, you probably don’t know what type of corn it is, or even that there are different types of corn.

Many people think popcorn, sweet corn and field corn are one in the same. But they’re not.

**How they are related**
All corn, or maize, is a whole grain and part of the grass family. Leafy stalks produce ears that contain seeds called kernels. The kernels are made up of three components: the germ (the embryo; the part that germinates and would create a new plant), endosperm (contains starch and feeds the germ), and pericarp (or hull, the outer shell).

**How they differ**

**Field/Dent Corn**
By far, the largest amount of corn grown in the U.S. is field corn (also know as ‘dent’ corn). Roughly 88 million acres of field corn are planted each year, used primarily for animal feed and corn related products. It is harvested when the kernels are hard and relatively dry and has a pronounced depression or dent at the crown of the kernel. The kernels contain a hard form of starch at the sides and a soft type in the center. The soft starch shrinks as the kernel ripens resulting in the distinct dent.

**Sweet Corn**
Sweet corn, bred for its sweet taste, is picked early, when kernels are fully formed but not fully mature (milk stage). Sweet corn has a high moisture content and a high sugar content. The kernels look shriveled and wrinkled when dried, turning almost translucent and highly irregular in shape because of the sugar in it. Sweet corn is sold and prepared as a vegetable although technically it is a grain.

**Popcorn**
Popcorn is the only type of corn that pops. Each kernel of popcorn contains a small drop of water stored inside a circle of soft starch. When harvested, popcorn is dried so that it contains between 13.5-14% moisture, the amount it needs to pop. The soft starch is surrounded by the kernel’s hard outer surface, the hull, which has just the right thickness to allow it to burst open when enough pressure builds inside.

As the kernel heats up, the water expands, creates steam, and cooks the starch inside, turning it into a liquid mass. Pressure builds inside and finally reaches a point that breaks the hull open. The contents inflate and spill out, cooling immediately and forming the shape we know and love. You can watch popcorn popping in super slow motion at the Popcorn Board’s Web site www.popcorn.org. And check out more fun facts, trivia and recipes while you’re there!

Popcorn, sweet corn and field corn are different types of corn. Only popcorn pops.