Corn (Zea mays L.) breeding for hybrid development was begun in the early 1900s with the work of Shull (1909), East (1908), and others, but a primitive type of breeding was conducted for thousands of years by the American Indians before the European colonists began settlement in the New World. The U.S. Corn Belt dents were derived from crosses that included germ plasm of the northeastern flint and southern dent or gourd-seed types, beginning about 1850, with subsequent selection that developed the U.S. Corn Belt dents. Open-pollinated cultivars, such as Reid Yellow Dent, Krug, Leaming, and Lancaster Sure Crop were developed by a type of mass selection that was based on plant, ear, and grain type. This early work, which was done primarily by farmers and seedsmen, provided the germplasm sources from which were developed the inbred parental lines that were used to produce the first double-cross hybrids used in the USA. Even to the present time, relatively little germ plasm from other countries has been used in corn breeding programs in the USA (Brown, 1975).

Breeding procedures were used to improve and develop new strains of the open-pollinated cultivars in the late 1800s and early 1900s before the development of inbred lines for hybrid seed production was begun. These breeding procedures included varietal hybridization, mass selection, and ear-to-row selection. Descriptions of the procedures have been published in earlier years, and results from a few studies were summarized by Sprague and Eberhart (1977). These procedures were not successful to effect yield improvements. In some instances, varietal hybridization