Many species of birds eat sunflower seeds. Most persons who have operated a feeding station for birds, especially in midwinter, are aware of the fondness of many birds for sunflower seed. Producers of birdfeed for these stations include sunflower seed in all of their high quality bird feeds. One reason for reintroduction of commercial sunflower plantings into North America during the 1950’s and 1960’s was to supply an increasing demand for birdfeed. Schaffner and Taylor (20) reported that about 65% of the sunflower seed produced in 1965 was used in bird feeding stations and indicated that demand exceeded 1,360 metric tons (30 million lb) annually for this use. Farmers should not be surprised that many species of birds consider sunflower fields as incredibly large feeding stations. That this may be an accurate appraisal is confirmed by many vehement complaints from farmers planting sunflower adjacent to favored bird habitats, such as marsh and tree cover.

Sunflower seed is a preferred bird food because the seed contains many proteins and fats essential to their growth, molt, fat storage, and weight maintenance processes. Unfortunately for North American producers, sunflower ripens in the postbreeding season of the birds, when the food demands of bird populations are near their annual peak. Bird numbers at this time are at their annual high, because the fledged young have been added recently to the adult population. The energy reserves of adult birds are minimal, and they have a high food demand at this time, having spent long periods during the nesting season in defending breeding territories, laying eggs, and raising their young. They badly need high energy foods to complete replacement of their feathers, which are molted annually in August and September, and to store fat that will be needed for the annual fall migration of hundreds or thousands of kilometers through regions where foods may not be as plentiful nor weather conditions as suitable for feeding.

The Great Plains of northern North America has long been a banquet table for birds. Sunflower growers recently have added a large and pre-