A culinary delight so identified with the South as to be part of a stereotype is the result of a seed treatment. The product of this seed treatment can help eliminate a terrible disease, yet it is so common in the South that few southerners would consider it as medicine. The product is grits. Not “a grit” as Joe Pesci says in the film “My Cousin Vinny,” but white, coarse or fine hominy grits.

Hominy grits are made from corn following a process called “nixtamalization.” In the treatment, corn is heated in boiling alkali until the kernels swell, then steeped, washed, and the pericarp removed. The large white endosperm thus resulting is the source of hominy. The term “hominy” usually refers to whole, coarsely or finely ground nixtamal, or to a cooked porridge (also called “samp”) prepared from this (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nixtamalization and Jackson et al., 1988). The treatment makes corn-derived niacin nutritionally available to humans. Dietary niacin eliminates pellagra, which was associated with a corn diet that was carbohydrate rich and low in niacin. Using alkali-treated corn seeds allowed the addition of niacin in niacin-deficient diets and helped eliminate pellagra. The history of this disease and its cure in the South suggest parallels with today’s seed treatment controversies. If an old seed treatment helped solve an old problem, can new seed treatments help address new problems?

The part of this definition that talks about applying biological organisms and chemical ingredients to seed to control pests seems to be the focus of major controversy about seed treatments. Sounds much like pesticides or herbicides, doesn’t it? Immediately those who oppose using pesticides or herbicides have a negative response when they hear those two words. Many times they haven’t heard the word “seed”; they heard “application of chemicals.” While they love whatever environmental stewardship is to them, they haven’t yet heard about seed treatment stewardship. There is no linking of treatment to stewardship.

As in many industries, perceptions about agriculture are often most shaped by consumers who are neither aware of nor particularly caring about how food and fiber get to their table. If we are one of the relatively few who work very closely with producers, we need to develop and tell stories that expand the story of how producers are environmental stewards. We need to link treatment to stewardship. Linking disease cures to an agricultural enterprise becomes agricultural friend building.

The reason we need to do this is because telling such a story focuses attention on “the farmer” and on environmental stewardship instead of just “agriculture.” We need to do this because by itself agriculture is so abstract a term that it defines an industry in such a way that the industry

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**Seed treatment is the application of biological organisms and chemical ingredients to seed to suppress, control, or repel plant pathogens, insects, or other pests that attack seeds, seedlings, or plants. Seed-applied technologies such as inoculants, herbicide safeners, micronutrients, plant growth regulators, seed coatings, colorants, etc. may also be applied to the seed. Treated seed is intended for planting only and not for food or feed uses.**

**How to make the case**

Before making the case to others, it is important to define a seed treatment. The American Seed Trade Association and CropLife America (2013) tell us: