

# WHITE LANZHOU MELON

*Seeds Of Diplomacy*



**PLACE**  
China

**USE**  
Fresh eating

**SPROUTS IN**  
7-14 days

**IDEAL TEMP**  
75-90 F

**PLANTING DEPTH**  
½ inch deep

**PLANT SPACING**  
18" apart

**FROST HARDY**  
No

**MINIMUM SUN**  
8-12 hours

**GROWING TIPS**  
Melons prefer slightly sandy, very rich, well-drained soil. Be careful not to over water vines, especially as fruit is approaching maturity.

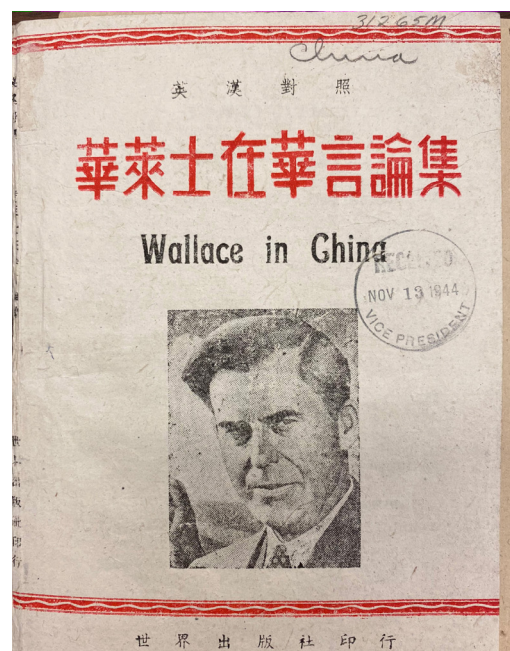
**FUN FACT**  
Another name for the melon is Bailan, a combination of the Chinese word for "white" and the first syllable of Lanzhou.



In 1944, Vice President Henry A. Wallace undertook an expedition to China and the Soviet Union. Coming at a critical time in World War II, with Wallace facing political headwinds at home, the 51-day, 27,000 mile trip was an audacious journey by any measure.

A largely overlooked footnote is that Wallace took seeds with him, including one for a sweet, white honeydew that took root on farms around Lanzhou, in the Chinese province of Gansu. Such an exchange of seeds was natural for Wallace; he lived and breathed a love of plants and a commitment to farmers and agriculture, and he passionately believed that agriculture was a pillar of national stability, security and prosperity, at home and abroad.

"Even in the darkest days of World War II, when he took this trip to China, he was fascinated by what was growing, what was happening in agriculture. He was



The Chinese warmly welcomed Henry A. Wallace's vice presidential visit in 1944.





Henry A. Wallace visiting with cows during his trip to China in 1944. Photo credit: Henry A. Wallace Collection, University of Iowa.



A photo of a Chinese village street, from Wallace's 1944 travels in China. Photo credit: Henry A. Wallace Collection, University of Iowa.



Wallace was fascinated by the agricultural practices he encountered on his travels in China. Photo credit: Henry A. Wallace Collection, University of Iowa.

basically curious and dedicated to that," said Wallace's great-nephew Robert Fleming.

Wallace also embraced the metaphorical significance of seeds. In the book *Soviet Asia Mission*, his account of the trip published in 1946, he wrote: "The exchange of seeds is not a trivial matter ... The selected American seeds that I gave to the farmers of Eastern Asia will (also) grow. And the East Asian seeds I brought back to Alaska and the United States will likewise flourish. The plants from these seeds can in both countries stand as symbols of growing understanding."

"World security on the basis of broader understanding," Wallace wrote, "was the long-term purpose of my mission to Central Asia."

Wallace spent the bulk of his time — nearly a month — traveling in Siberia. Though his Soviet hosts wanted to impress him with their technology and infrastructure, he was mainly interested in visiting with farmers and sharing seeds.

The Chinese leg of his trip lasted 16 days, only four of which he spent in Chungking, the seat of the Nationalist Chinese government. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had asked Wallace to convey that the government led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek was critical to American interests dealing effectively with Japan in WWII.

From Chungking, he flew to Kunming and Chengdu before landing in Lanzhou (Lanchow), his last Chinese stop before returning home.

According to some reports, Dr. Zhang Xinyi, the director of the Construction Department of Gansu Province (and a 1925 graduate of Iowa State College, now Iowa State University), had reached out to an American ecologist the previous year, asking for help researching and solving the region's drought problem, which had led to repeated crop failures. The ecologist told Zhang that he thought melons would grow well there. Wallace is said to have delivered the honeydew melon seeds directly to Zhang on his stop in Lanzhou.

While the exact provenance of the melon variety isn't recorded, it's likely that Wallace got the seeds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which he oversaw as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1940, before President Franklin Roosevelt tapped him as his running mate. Wallace's grandson, David Wallace Douglas, said his grandfather would naturally have reached out to the USDA and asked what varieties would grow best in the climates he was visiting. (Wallace's vice presidential correspondence is peppered with frequent exchanges about seeds with



E.C. Auchter, Research Administrator at the USDA.)

The melon, often called Bailan or Hualaishi (an adaptation of the word “Wallace”), became popular in China, but its story was lost in the U.S. until 1980, when Xu Feiqing, then Gansu’s deputy governor, visited Iowa. According to a story in the *Des Moines Register*, Xu made the connection between Wallace, an Iowa native, and the melon so beloved in Gansu.

“He brought the melon seeds as a gesture of good will,” Xu told the newspaper. “After the war (World War II) was over, the government found farmers in the province were farming the melons so they helped the peasants by providing financing and fertilizer for farming them.”

After the Chinese Communist Party took control in 1949, Xu said, the melon’s name was changed to White Lanzhou, due to political tensions between China and the U.S.

Sometime in the mid 1980s, Wallace’s daughter Jean Douglas (who, like her father, was an avid gardener) received some White Lanzhou seeds and began growing them at Farvue Farm, the family farm near South Salem, NY.

But without the efforts of the late William A. Murray, a professor emeritus of agricultural economics at Iowa State University and the founder of Iowa’s Living History Farms, who was also related by marriage to the Wallace family, this sweet melon might never have been preserved in the U.S.

Murray acquired some seeds from Jean Douglas in 1990 and submitted them to the USDA National Plant Germplasm system, which plays a critical role in protecting plant diversity and making seed stock available for research.

Kathy Reitsma, the curator of vegetable crops for the USDA’s Plant Introduction Station at Iowa State, in Ames, grew the seeds using controlled pollination techniques. “Controlled pollination,” she wrote in an email, “is used to conserve the genetics as close to the original seed as possible.”

Baker Creek founder Jere Gettle found the seeds of this Chinese melon in the USDA database a few years ago, and after extensive trial growing, we are so happy to make it available beyond the melon fields of China.

### **“GOOD FARMING, CLEAR THINKING, RIGHT LIVING”**

Henry Agard Wallace was born in 1888 into a family devoted to agriculture, and to Iowa’s farmers. His father, Henry C., had studied agriculture at Iowa State, and he was

Henry A. Wallace loved to stop and visit with farmers during his travels, including, presumably, this man and woman working in a field in Gansu Province, where the Lanzhou melon took root.  
Photo credit: Henry A. Wallace Collection, University of Iowa.



Lanzhou, population 3.8 million, is the capital of Gansu Province, in northwest China.





Henry A. Wallace in 1940.



Henry A. Wallace was born in this farmhouse near Orient, Iowa, in 1888.

a proponent of applying scientific principles to farming. (He would later teach at Iowa State and also serve as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 1921 to 1924.) Henry A.'s grandfather, Henry, was a prominent voice for farmers through his work as a newspaper publisher and the editor of agricultural journals, including *Iowa Homestead*, and later, *Wallaces' Farmer*, the family publication for which Henry A. wrote and edited for 20 years.

But before "Uncle Henry," as Wallace's grandfather was known to his thousands of loyal readers, was a journalist, he was a Presbyterian minister, until exhaustion and ill health forced him from the pulpit in 1877. Uncle Henry believed in faith through service, and he cared most about farmers.

"This belief — the cause of religion and duty and agriculture rolled into one — he stamped indelibly on the Wallace family name. This was Henry Agard Wallace's inheritance from the moment of his birth," wrote John C. Culver and John Hyde in their biography of Wallace, *American Dreamer: A Life Of Henry A. Wallace*.

Wallace lived into this belief, wholeheartedly, and sometimes uncomfortably, until his death from Lou Gehrig's disease in 1965.

In many ways, Henry A. Wallace was an unlikely political figure, a serious man with



A young Henry A. Wallace, left, shows his grandfather Henry some of the corn from his breeding experiments in 1913. Photo courtesy of The Wallace Centers of Iowa.



an analytical mind, a wide-ranging interest in spiritual and philosophical matters and a hard-wired commitment to agriculture and farmers. He spurned alcohol and tobacco, and he relished exercise and healthy eating. Indeed, he had internalized the motto on the masthead of *Wallace's Farmer*: "Good farming, clear thinking, right living."

### A POWERFUL ADVOCATE FOR FARMERS

Though Henry A. Wallace only briefly farmed for a living, his life's work revolved around agriculture.

"In my early life, I would say that I thought completely in terms of seeds, plants and farming," Wallace recalled in an oral history project of Columbia University called "The Reminiscences of Henry A. Wallace." "At that time, I had no thought of public life."

In 1894 and 1895, when Wallace's father was teaching dairying at Iowa State, young Henry A. befriended botanist George Washington Carver, who was in Ames earning his master's degree. Under Carver's tutelage, Henry A. grew ever more fascinated by plants and plant breeding.

As a teenager, Wallace challenged Perry G. Holden, the "corn evangelist" and leading advocate for Reid Yellow Dent corn, an open-pollinated variety from Illinois. With its long, broad cobs and uniform kernels, it was the gold standard of the day. After watching a corn judging contest at Iowa State, Wallace asked Holden how he knew that the best-looking corn would also be the highest yielding. At the elder Wallace's urging, Holden gave the teen samples of corn judged to be "best" and "worst," and the following spring, Wallace grew them on five acres behind the family house in Des Moines, meticulously tracking and recording each plant. In the end, his hunch was correct: the corn's good looks had nothing to do with yield.

From then on, hybrid corn became a pillar of his career. Henry A. Wallace studied statistics as part of his degree program at Iowa State, a discipline that gave him the tools to analyze the results of his breeding experiments.

In 1924, a hybrid he called "Copper Cross" was named the highest-yielding corn in south-central Iowa. The Iowa Seed Co. offered Wallace's hybrid in its 1924 catalog. Two years later, with his brother James W. Wallace and a few other men, Wallace formed Hi-Bred Corn Co., the first company to focus exclusively on developing, producing and distributing hybrid seed corn. The word "Pioneer" was added to the company name in the mid 1930s.

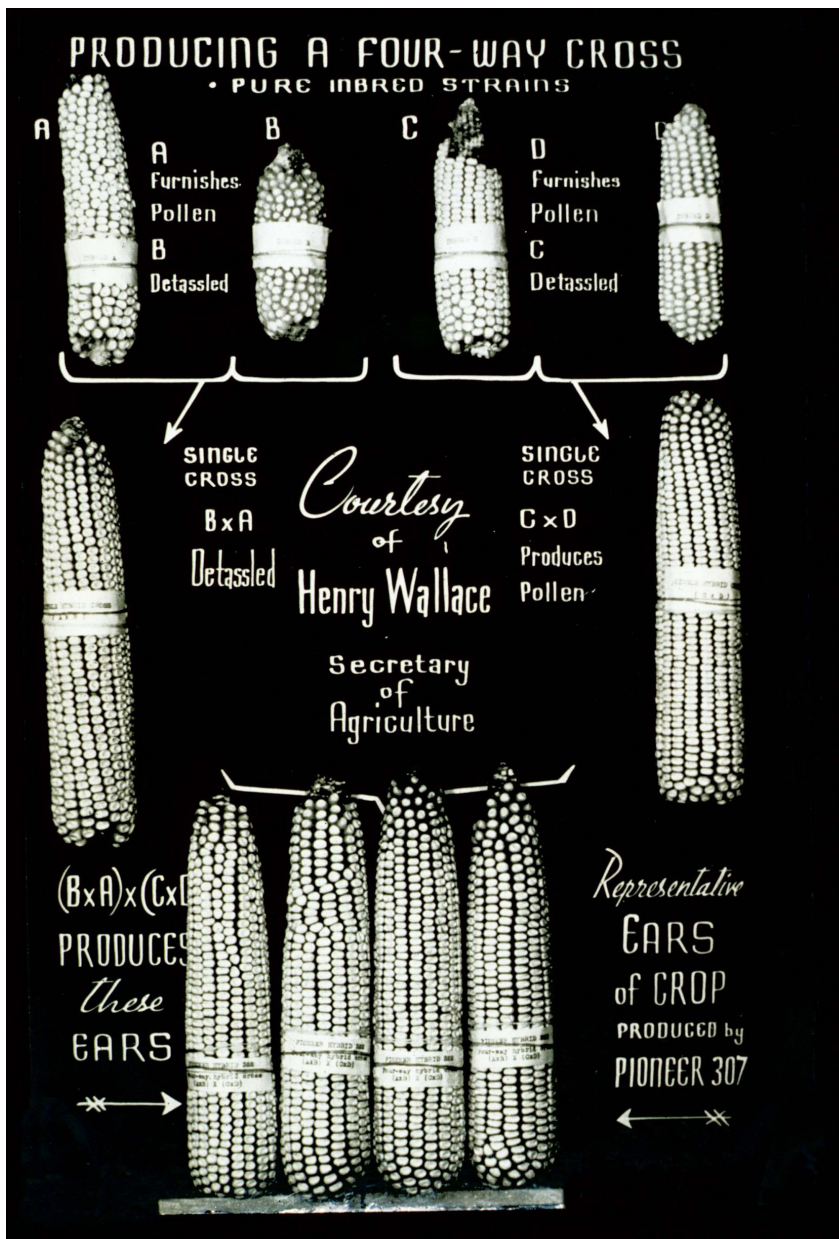


Henry A. Wallace inspects ears of corn for his breeding project in the garage of Clyde Herring, who would serve as Iowa governor and a U.S. senator from Iowa, ca. 1920s. Photo courtesy of The Wallace Centers of Iowa.



Henry A. Wallace's breeding work revolutionized corn farming. His Hi-Bred Corn Co. added the word "Pioneer" to its name in 1935.





A diagram of Pioneer's method for a four-way hybrid corn cross. Photo courtesy of The Wallace Centers of Iowa (wallace.org).



None of it would have been possible without Wallace's wife, Ilo Browne Wallace, who used most of her inheritance to buy the family its 50 shares. The family farmland that she had purchased near Johnston, Iowa, also gave the fledgling company growing space for research.

The company quickly realized that the way to sell its seeds was by enlisting the help of farmers who were growing them. Within 10 years, hybrid corn had largely replaced the lower-yielding seed corn that Iowa farmers had saved year to year.

"He was drawn into commercializing it (hybrid corn) because he was so anxious to spread the seeds," Fleming said. "The mission of the firm was to feed the world. He thought, 'This is great, farmers are going to have a chance to succeed with these seeds that I've developed.'"

I don't think he was surprised that he was able to develop high-yielding varieties," Fleming said. "He was trying to create something that was better. And then it turned out to be so wildly in demand when it became available."

The introduction of hybrid corn also came at a precipitous time for farmers, who had begun to feel the effects of the Great Depression nearly a decade before the stock market crash of 1929. It was a stark turn of events from the days of prosperity during World War I. Farm income fell; foreclosures rose, and government relief was not forthcoming.

Wallace was still the editor of the family publication, writing forceful and influential pieces, as well as advocating for the McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Act, which would have subsidized American farmers by raising the domestic prices of farm products, then buying surpluses and selling them overseas. Among the bill's biggest foes was Herbert Hoover, then the Secretary of Commerce.

His first dip into politics came during the 1928 presidential campaign, when Republicans nominated Hoover to lead the ticket. Wallace, a Republican, considered farmers' options, and, despite some misgivings, threw his support to the Democrat, Gov. Alfred E. Smith.

In 1929, Wallaces' Farmer spent \$2 million buying its rival publication, Iowa Homestead. The purchase put Wallace's family paper into debt. Wallace thought it unwise, but he had no say in the matter. His Hi-Bred Corn Co. had yet to make much of a profit. And when the stock market crashed in 1929, the family eventually lost control of the paper that bore its name. Henry A. Wallace stayed on as editor.



## FDR, THE NEW DEAL AND WALLACE

Wallace warmed to Hoover's Democratic rival in the 1932 presidential election, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and began working with others on a policy proposal that would pay farmers to limit production — a strategy that Wallace believed could stabilize prices and production.

The plan eventually became part of Roosevelt's "New Deal," and as Roosevelt's agriculture secretary, Wallace oversaw some of the most consequential — and sometimes controversial — agriculture policies of the 20th century, including controlled production, soil conservation and crop subsidy programs that endured well after his tenure ended.

But had it not been for the impact of the depression on his own fortunes, Wallace might never have entered politics. Nonetheless, Wallace saw his role as agriculture secretary as an extension of his work as a journalist, Robert Fleming said.

"He was made to be Secretary of Agriculture," Fleming said.

Roosevelt's choice of Wallace to join him on the presidential ticket didn't sit well with a lot of Democrats — after all, Wallace had long been a Republican. He was also seen as a political oddball.

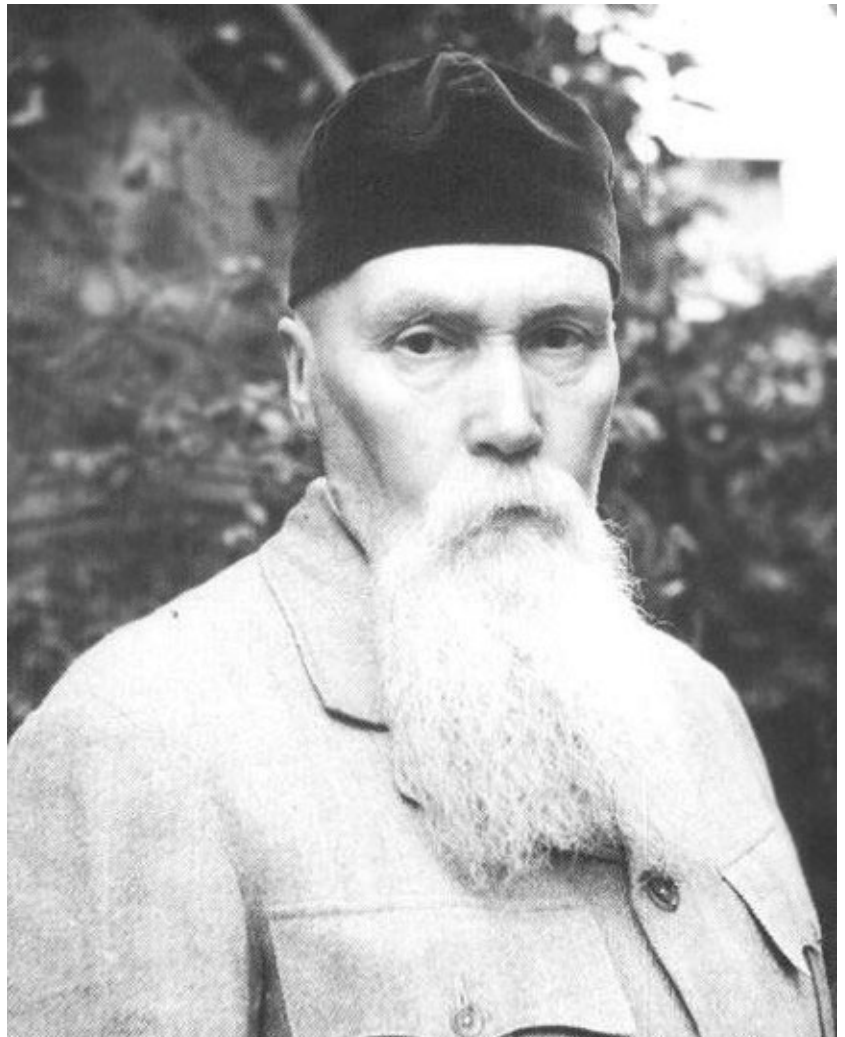
Wallace adhered to a political worldview with ideals of "peace, prosperity and equality" at its center. He saw the possibilities for a postwar era that would transcend balance-of-power geopolitics. He spoke idealistically about the Soviet Union, predicting that one day Americans and the Soviets would find common ground. In his 1942 speech to the Free World Association, best remembered for coining the phrase "the Century of the Common Man," Wallace called World War II a "fight between a slave world and a free world." Rather than believing in American Exceptionalism, said his great-nephew Robert Fleming, Wallace believed in "the exceptionalism of Americans in the world."

On some level, Roosevelt admired Wallace's idealism, but he had also grown increasingly disenchanted with his lack of regard for politics. When he agreed to let Wallace go on his mission to China and Soviet Asia, he was already considering replacing him as his running mate. At the 1944 nominating convention, Wallace lost the vote to Harry Truman.

Wallace continued to support Roosevelt's re-election, and he rejoined the administration as Secretary of Commerce in 1945. After Roosevelt's death in April 1945, Truman kept Wallace on as commerce secretary for a time. But the two men clashed over Truman's



Wallace and FDR gave a radio address in the 1940s. Photo credit: Henry A. Wallace Collection, University of Iowa.



Wallace's one-time association with the Russian painter and theosophist Nicholas Roerich dogged him throughout much of his political career.





Wallace tended a "victory garden" on the grounds of the Swiss embassy in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of The Wallace Centers of Iowa.



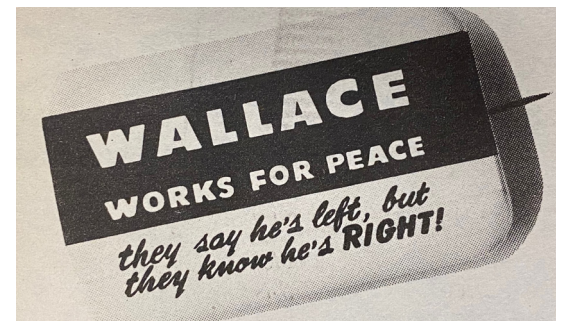
We are so happy to be reintroducing this wonderful honeydew melon to gardens everywhere.

support of militarism to combat the spread of communism, and Truman eventually forced him to resign. Wallace became the editor of *The New Republic*.

In December of 1947, he launched a third-party presidential bid as a member of the Progressive Party. Progressives sought desegregation, the creation of a national health insurance system and the expansion of the welfare system, among other priorities.

After his crushing loss in the 1948 election, Wallace retired from political life and eventually returned to his farm in New York, where he turned to developing new and better varieties of gladioli and strawberries.

He died in 1965, at age 77.



Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign was a crucible for tensions between non-Communist progressives and members of the pro-Soviet American Communist Party.



Henry C. Wallace died in 1924 while serving as Secretary of Agriculture. Wallace's *Farmer* memorialized him with a front-page obituary.