

Ferrari Tractor CIE

"Appropriate Technology for Agriculture"

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Mustard Seed Harvesting

I was recently asked for a system for harvesting Mustard seed in centers of vine rows. Mustard is one of the oldest and most common cover crops that has been used in California orchards and vineyards.

The seeds of the mustard plant are very small spheres that ripen in a paper like pod; Their size is similar to broccoli seed. As the seed matures the pod becomes more easily crumbled and eventually allows seed to scatter.

Harvesting Mustard seed must be done in several steps, much as Broccoli seed, Onion seed and Sesame seed among others are. Plant is cut at stage where seed is mature but pods are still a little green and less easily shattered open by vibrations during cutting and handling. Plants are cut by hand or with sicklebar or custom made bandsaw mower. As soon as cut, plants are laid on tarps or paper trays, the way grapes being harvested for raisins are, laying in sun the seed pods dry up and become very brittle and easily crumbled. The tarps or paper trays can be rolled up and the plant material put through a stationary thresher and seed cleaner.

When done on large scale in open fields a combine with a specialized pick up reel takes in plants paper trays and all and feeds them through the combine. In narrow spaces more hand work is the rule.