

HISTORY OF THE SOYBEAN

THE MIGRATION FROM ASIA TO AMERICA



An ancient Chinese legend tells that the wild soybean's nutritious properties were first discovered by a group of traveling merchants.

In 2838 B.C., Chinese Emperor Sheng-Nung wrote *Materia Medica* - the first written record of soybean cultivation. In that record, soybeans were noted as being valued for their medicinal purposes.

Soybeans were first cultivated in northern China. From there, their use spread into Japan, Korea, and the rest of Southeast Asia.

The soybean is mentioned in medical records from China, Egypt, and Mesopotamia that date from 1500 B.C. or earlier. In ancient times, moldy and fermented substances from soybeans were commonly used as primitive antibiotics to treat wounds and reduce swelling.

Soybeans were first introduced to Europe in 1712 by Englebert Kaempfer, a German botanist who had studied in Japan.



Swedish botanist Carl von Linne made the first scientific study of the soybean in the Western world. He named it *Glycine max* because of the unusually large nitrogen-producing nodules on its roots. Unfortunately, poor climate and soil conditions in Europe limited attempts to produce soybeans as a viable crop there.

Soybeans were first brought to America in the early 19th century as ballast in trading ships returning from the East.

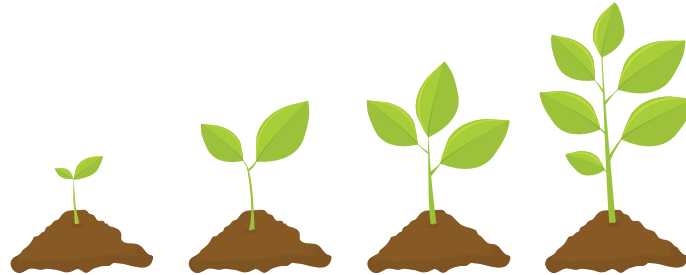
The first mention of soybean cultivation in the New World appeared in 1804 when James Mease published literature promoting the soybean as an adaptable crop from Pennsylvania.

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In 1829, U.S. farmers first grew soybeans. They raised a variety to make soy sauce. During the Civil War, soldiers used soybeans as “coffee berries” to brew a form of coffee when real coffee was scarce.

In 1879, soybean crops were harvested at two agricultural experiment stations in New Jersey from seeds obtained in Europe. By 1889, several more agricultural experiment stations in the United States were working with soybeans using seed varieties brought from Japan.



By 1898, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began introducing new varieties of soybeans from Asia, and research into the bean’s potential started. By 1907, there were 23 varieties of the plant in the United States, including 15 based on USDA research.

By the 20th century, many American farmers were growing soybeans as a forage crop for cattle.

In 1904, at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, noted botanist and chemist George Washington Carver began studying the soybean. His discoveries changed the way people thought about the soybean; no longer was it just a forage crop. Now its beans provided valuable protein and oil.



William Morse, director of forage crop investigations at the Arlington Experimental Farm in Virginia, led USDA’s efforts to gain acceptance of the soybean as a potentially major agricultural crop in America. Morse went on to help form the American Soybean Association in 1919, becoming its first president.

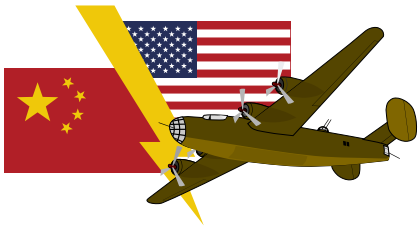


In 1920, combines were first used to harvest soybeans, making them as easy to harvest as they were to grow.

In 1922, Staley Co. built the first major U.S. soybean processing plant in Decatur, Illinois. By 1929, U.S. soybean production had grown to 9 million bushels.

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By 1940, the U.S. soybean crop had grown to 78 million bushels, and the United States was a net exporter of soybeans and soybean products. That same year, Henry Ford took an ax to a car trunk made with soybean plastic to showcase its durability. The publicity increased the soybean's popularity.



The 1940s were a major turning point for soybean production in the United States. American farmers and soybean processors were ready to fill the gap when tension rose in China and World War II disrupted the traditional chain and sources of protein and edible oils.

In the early 1950s, soybean meal became available as a low-cost, high-protein feed ingredient, triggering an explosion in U.S. livestock and poultry production. This assured a vast and continuing market for soybean farmers' output. In 1956, the American Soybean Association began to promote U.S. soybeans in Japan, opening its first international office there.



In 2001, U.S. farmers surpassed a milestone in agricultural history by exporting more than 1 billion bushels of soybeans.

Today, farmers in more than 30 states grow soybeans, making soybeans the United States' second largest crop in cash sales and the No. 1 value crop export.

