

SOYBEAN HISTORY AT A GLANCE

A historical chronology of the soybean's migration from Asia to modern-day use in America:

- ❖ An ancient Chinese legend tells that the wild soybean's nutritious properties were first discovered by a band of traveling merchants.
- ❖ 2838 B.C. Chinese emperor Sheng-Nung writes *Materia Medica* – the first written record of soybean cultivation. In that record, soybeans were noted as being valued for their medicinal properties.
- ❖ Soybeans were first cultivated in northern China. From there, 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 introduced to Europe in 1712 by Englebert Kaempfer, a German botanist who had studied in Japan.
- ❖ Swedish botanist Carl von Linné made the first scientific study of the soybean in the West. 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 crop there.
- ❖ Soybeans were first brought to America in the early 19th century by 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 for Pennsylvania.
- ❖ In 1829, a brown-seeded soybean variety was shown in the Botany Garden at Cambridge, Massachusetts. But it wasn't until later in the century that interest in the soybean as a crop began to take root.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ A significant breakthrough for the soybean in America occurred in 1896, when noted botanist and chemist George Washington Carver became head of the department of agriculture at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Carver's research into new crops for the depleted soils of the South led to extensive experimentation with soybeans and other nitrogen-producing legumes. To find new uses for these crops, he developed more than 300 by-products, including oils and food substitutes. Carver's work led to the development of what would become soybeans' two main uses on the American continent – edible oil and meal.
- ❖ By 1898 the United States Department of Agriculture began introducing new varieties of soybeans from Asia, and research into the beans' potential began in earnest. By 1907, there were 23 varieties of the plant in the United States, including 15 based upon USDA research.
- ❖ William Morse, director of forage crop investigations at the Arlington Experimental Farm in Virginia, led the 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, the first soybean processing plant opened.
- ❖ In 1929, U.S. soybean production grew to 9 million bushels. By 1939, production had increased tenfold to 91 million bushels.
- ❖ The 1940s were a major turning point for soybeans in the United States. American farmers and soybean processors were ready to fill the gap when revolution in China and World War II disrupted soybean production and put traditional sources of protein and oils in short supply.

- ❖ 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 and assuring a vast and continuing market for soybean farmers' output.
- ❖ In 1952, efforts began to expand export markets by promoting American soybeans and soybean products with Japan and around the world.
- ❖ By 1992, the United States accounted for 51 percent of the world's soybean production, and soybeans were America's second largest crop in cash sales.