

HISTORY OF SOYBEAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE
UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The soybean has been known in most of the countries of the Orient since prehistoric times. Over fifty different names have been listed by Piper and Morse, United States Department of Agriculture, thus showing its great antiquity. It is said to have been mentioned by the Chinese Emperor Chen Nung in the ancient *Materia Medica* in the year 2838 B. C. It is also described in several ancient Chinese dictionaries under different names, one of which was *sou* from which, these authors suggest, our recent names *soi*, *soy*, *soja* and *soya* are probably derived. DeCandolle says it is doubtless the plant called *shu* in the Chinese writings of the time of Confucius; that the species was wild in Cochinchina to the south of Java when the ancient people of this region began to cultivate it at a very early period.

A good deal of confusion seems to have prevailed for many years concerning the correct botanical name. However, after much study of the subject Piper and Morse concluded that the correct name must be *Soja max.*

The soybean found its way into Europe near the close of the eighteenth century, its culture having been recorded in England in 1790. It was introduced into the state of Pennsylvania in the United States in 1804, but for many years received only occasional notice. Morse, in *Farmers' Bulletin* 1520, states that since 1890 nearly all of the state experiment stations in the United States have conducted experiments with it.

It has been only during the last twenty to twenty-five years that the farmers of the United States have given attention to the crop, though a report read by W. H. Stoddard of Macoupin County, Illinois, at a farmers' institute in 1898 shows that the farmers of that community had a good deal of practical knowledge concerning it. No figures showing the acreage produced in the United States are given until the year 1917 when 460,000 acres were reported from seventeen states. In 1924 there were 2,500,000 acres grown of which 613,000 acres were harvested for seed. In 1930 the acreage grown for seed was 1,105,000 of which 843,000 acres were grown in seven states. Illinois led with 321,000 acres, followed in order by North Carolina, Missouri, Iowa, Ohio, Tennessee, and Oklahoma.

Probably the most important by-product of the soybean is oil which is used in the manufacture of paint, varnish, linoleum, oilcloth, artificial leather, etc. In the year 1922-23 9,528,900 pounds of soybeans were used in producing 1,482,000 pounds of oil. By 1929-30 this had increased to 95,676,000 pounds of beans producing 12,482,000 pounds of oil.

Experiment stations in the United States have done much in improving varieties. This is notably true in Illinois, where, under the direction of Dr. C. M. Woodworth, the Illini, an early variety of great merit has been developed.