

Soybeans-The Miracle Crop

Nature has gifted us with a variety of crops, but only one--the humble soybean--has earned the title of miracle crop. What makes this plant so special?

To begin with, soybeans are highly versatile," which means they can be grown in a number of climate conditions and consumed' in different ways. When soybean seeds first arrived in America from China in the mid-eighteenth century, they were planted for the purpose of making soy sauce. During the Civil War, when coffee beans were scarce, soldiers used soybeans to make a coffee substitute.

The reputation of soybeans as a miracle crop took root in the early 1900s, when their many uses became known. The scientist George Washington Carver discovered that soybeans were a valuable source of protein and oil. In the 1930s, automobile producer Henry Ford even built cars with plastic made from soybeans.

After World War II, the United States became wealthier, and more people demanded' meat on their plates. To support this increased meat production, farmers used soybean meal to feed their livestock* because of its cheap cost and high protein content. All the while, soy remained a steady part of American diets, though mostly in refined forms.