

Growing Food

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Table of Contents



Crops That Feed the World **4**



Growing Rice **16**





Life on the Farm **24**

Glossary **31**

Index **32**



That Feed the World

Every sixty seconds, humans eat 5.2 million kilograms (11.5 million pounds) of food. This number continually rises because Earth's population is growing rapidly. Since 1900, the number of humans in the world has increased from 1.6 billion to over 7 billion.





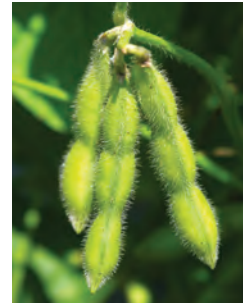
corn



rice



wheat



soybeans



potatoes

Farmers grow most of the world's food, or crops. Crops are plants that humans grow and harvest. Different regions of the world are better suited for growing different crops. The amount of rain and sunlight and the eating habits of the public all control which food is produced and where it is grown.

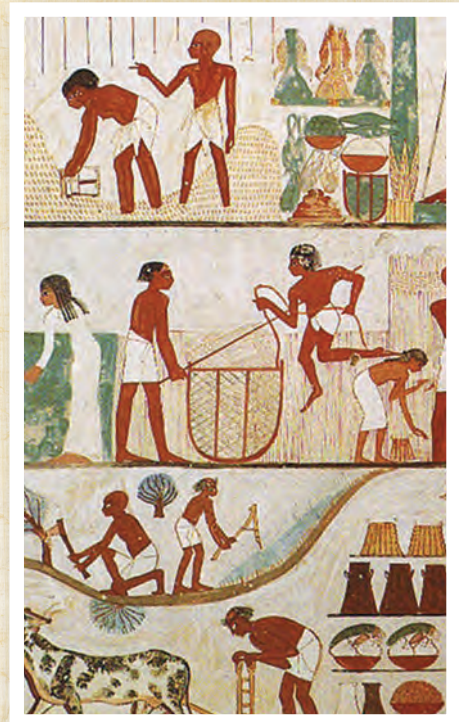
Around the world, humans grow and

eat all types of food. However, just five crops make up a big chunk of the food supply. They are corn, rice, wheat, soybeans, and potatoes. Corn and rice are typically the most popular crops worldwide based on weight and number of plants. However, wheat takes up more land space than any other crop.

Civilized Farmers

Humans didn't always grow their food. They started out as hunter-gatherers. They hunted animals for meat and gathered wild edible plants. Around 12,000 years ago, humans changed their lifestyle. Instead of roaming the wilderness searching for food, they set up permanent settlements. Growing food meant a steady food supply and more free time. The human population grew rapidly. Language and the arts flourished.

According to *National Geographic*, different regions of the world focused on different crops. In the Middle East, wheat was a major crop. In Asia, people relied on rice. In Mexico, squash and corn became the most important crops. Historians aren't exactly sure why people started farming. But they agree that it is central to human civilization.

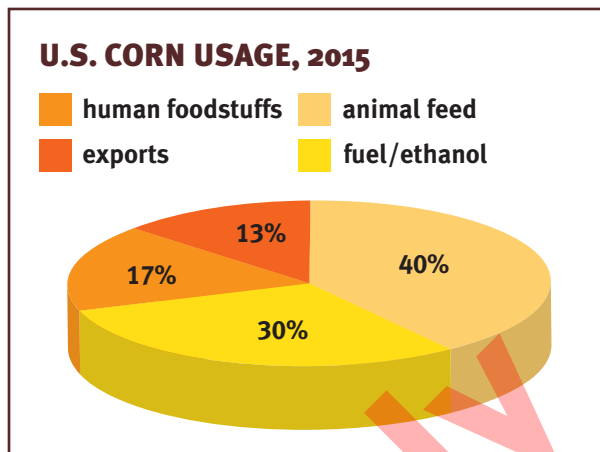


Corn

Corn has been important to humans for thousands of years. Also known as maize, this grain provides 21 percent of the world's nutrition. It's the largest crop, by weight, on Earth.

According to the *New York Times*, maize was first cultivated, or grown as a crop, around 9,000 years ago. However, until recently, plant scientists were not sure exactly how corn was domesticated. It doesn't grow in the wild, so ancient farmers couldn't have just planted wild corn seeds.

Scientists now believe that corn was cultivated from a type of wild Mexican grass known as *teosinte*. They think that early farmers practiced selective



breeding. They kept and sowed seeds from the *teosinte* plants with the most desirable qualities. So, year after year, the *teosinte* grew taller and had larger kernels, until it turned into the corn people know today.

Native Americans relied on corn. A corn crop could feed them all year. They often grew more corn than was needed. During harvest, they dried most of the corn from the field and saved it for winter. This allowed them

• CORN FACTS •

- Corn is called maize in most other countries.
- When European settlers first arrived in the Americas, corn was so valuable that they were able to trade it for meat and furs.
- Corn can be yellow, black, blue, purple, green, white, or red. Yellow is the most common variety.



▲ Scientists believe a Mexican grass called teosinte was the wild ancestor of corn. The two plants share many of the same genes.

to stay in one place instead of roaming to find food all year long.

Corn is still very important in the United States. According to *Scientific American*, corn covers over 97 million acres in the United States—an area about the size of California. It needs plenty of sun, water, and space, and grows very quickly.

A Fishy Secret

When the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in the 1600s, they had their first taste of corn. This golden crop helped them survive. Native Americans taught the Pilgrims about growing corn. They even taught them the secret to a good crop—planting a dead fish alongside the corn kernel. Today, gardeners know that dead fish contain nitrogen, an important plant nutrient. Nutrients like nitrogen help plants grow tall and produce more seeds. Today's farmers use modern fertilizers containing nitrogen.



Rice

Rice is a type of grass called *Oryza sativa*. There are over 40,000 different varieties.

According to some archaeologists, humans began growing rice for food around 7,000 years ago.

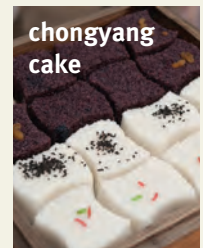
The first written records show up in China about 4,000 years ago. China developed sophisticated irrigation techniques to make sure the crop had plenty of water.

Today, rice is still a very important crop in China. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, China grows more rice than any other country does.

Celebrating with Rice

Rice is so important in China, many traditional holiday foods are made with it. Here are a few:

- On the first day of the full moon of each new year, people eat rice dumplings, known as yuanxiao in the north and tangyuan in the south, for good luck and fortune.
- Attendees at the Dragon Boat Festival eat zongzi. This is a type of sticky rice stuffed with a filling such as pork and wrapped in bamboo leaves.
- At the Double Ninth Day, which follows the harvest, families prepare chongyang cake made with rice flour.



• RICE FACTS •

- Rice is grown in at least 114 countries around the world.
- Rice is grown on every continent except Antarctica.
- Rice is the main food for half the people in the world.
- In China, the word for *rice* is the same as the word for *food*.

Growing rice is not easy. The crop requires a lot of water, and harvesting it is hard work. Even so, the small grain is currently the second most popular crop in the world. Asians are the largest growers and consumers of rice, but these “grass seeds” are grown all over the globe.



Rice grains are the seeds of a special type of grass.

Different Kinds of Rice

Rice can be categorized in many ways. It can be brown or white, long, medium, or short grain, or sticky or sweet, to name just a few. Here are some popular types of rice:



Brown rice: This is the whole grain, which means the hard outer layer, known as bran, has not been taken off. Brown rice is chewier than white rice and is considered more healthful because it contains more nutrients.

White rice: White rice is polished, which means the bran has been taken off. This makes it cook faster and keep longer without spoiling.

Wild rice: This comes from a slightly different variety of grass native to North America. It was an important food for Native Americans living around the Great Lakes.

Sticky rice: This rice, also known as glutinous rice, is very sticky when cooked. Sticky rice requires less water to grow than most other types of rice do.