In Yuma County, soybeans are a relatively new crop, hasn't been seen in the valley in years. Grown on about 100 acres, soybean prices have doubled over the last year making the crop very inviting for local growers in the Yuma area.

Soybeans were first grown as a crop in China some 5,000 years ago. Soybeans actually were introduced in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century, in 1804. They really were not grown regularly in the United States until 1829.

The utter versatility of soybeans was first appreciated during the U.S. Civil War when soybeans were used as so-called "coffee berries." Soybeans were used to brew a substitute coffee when regular coffee simply was not available due to the hostilities.

George Washington Carver led the way towards the soybean becoming used as a source of food for humans as well as oil to be used in food preparation. Prior to that time, soybeans were primarily utilized as a feed crop for animals.

In the U.S.A. today, farmers harvest over 2 billion bushels of the crop each year. The amount of soybeans being harvested in the U.S.A. is increasing each and every year. The United States is the largest grower of soybeans anywhere on the planet.

Over 85 million acres are planted with soybeans in the United States. The number of acres that are being dedicated to soybean cultivation is increasing with each passing year.

It is impossible to list all of the many uses that the versatile soybean is being put to in this day and age. Soybeans are widely used in an entire pantheon of food products in the 21st century. Soybeans are now used as food additives as well as the foundation for many different consumable products.

Soybeans are still used widely as feed for domesticated animals, particularly for cattle. In addition, soybean ink is utilized by more than half of all of the daily newspapers that are published in the United States. Indeed, the soybean even reaches to the primary school student's desk: one acre of soybeans can produce over 82,000 (yes, 82,000) crayons.

82% of edible fats and oils consumed in the United States each year are made from soybeans. Researchers are developing methods through which soybeans might be more fully utilized as a source of renewable energy. Additionally, as time moves onward, more and more uses for the humble soybean are being developed each and every year.

The Chinese have known the medicinal properties of fermented products for thousands of years. They have been using moldy soybean curds to treat skin infections for over 3000 years. Soybeans were first domesticated in China in about the 11th century BC.

The U.S. produced 84 million metric tons of soybeans in 2005, which was 37.9% of the world production of 222 million tons. The world's largest producer of soybeans is the U.S. with more than 1.5 million bushels each year. Soybeans are planted on almost 60 million acres of land in the U.S., and the U.S. grows about 2/3 of the world's soybeans.
The soybean is undoubtedly the king of beans, and is rapidly becoming the most important bean in the world. It was being cultivated in China before 3500 B.C., but was virtually unknown in Europe and the U.S. until 1900.

There are about 30 varieties, many of them different colors, but the one we see most is yellow. Unlike other beans, soybeans are as much as 35% protein, as little as 35% carbohydrate, and 18% fat. Soybeans are the only true meat substitute in the legume family, providing complete protein as well as essential amino acids, calcium, and B vitamins. In fact, soybeans are being looked upon as possible saviors of the world. They are able to provide a cheap and nutritional diet for the underdeveloped countries, as well as possible meat substitutes for the wealthier countries, where it may no longer be feasible to raise livestock because of shortages of land and grain.

Soybeans can be made into flour, broken up into grits, and into a curd called "tofu," which is used extensively in Japanese and Chinese cooking. The Chinese have traditionally used very little, if any, cow's milk, making instead soy milk obtained by crushing soybeans in water. Oil made from soybeans provides linoleic acid, one of the essential fatty acids. Soybeans can be used in many ways. They can be cooked like other dried beans and then flavored with different seasonings. Soy grits, which cook much more quickly than the whole beans, can be used as a meat extender, or added to soups or other moist foods.

Tofu, the soybean curd, can be cut up and added to soups or scrambled eggs; or stir-fried with vegetables, Chinese-style. Soy flour can be added in bread-making, providing extra protein and vitamins at very low cost, and can also be used to thicken soups and sauces. The versatility of this wonder bean is unlimited, but only as our natural resources become scarcer will we discover the true worth of the soybean.

During the Civil War, soybeans were used in place of coffee because real coffee was scarce. US farmers first grew soybeans as cattle feed.

Henry Ford experimented with soy-based plastics in the production of his cars. In 1940 he swung an axe at a car trunk to demonstrate the durability of soy plastics. Soy ink is used in over 95 percent of America’s daily newspapers that circulate more than fifteen hundred copies per run.

In the past 15 years, soyfoods have attracted the attention of research scientists around the world for health properties beyond basic nutrition as well.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officially recognized the cholesterol-lowering effects of soy protein in 1999 with a health claim stating that 25 grams of soy protein per day may reduce the risk of heart disease. Most soyfoods are also low in saturated and trans fats, one reason why the American Heart Association has recognized soyfoods' role in an overall heart-healthy diet.

Recent research suggests that soy may also lower risk of prostate, colon and breast cancers as well as osteoporosis and other bone health problems, and alleviate hot flashes associated with menopause.

The first recorded use of soy food dates back to 2838 B.C. In China they call the soy bean tautau, meaning "greater bean" due to its wholesomeness and health benefits that have sustained
that nation for the past 5,000 years. In Japan and China soy was a revered food and accorded the honorable "o" as in O-Tofu and O-Kara.

Soy is equivalent in protein quality to meat, milk or eggs. In fact, soy protein contains enough of all the essential amino acids to meet a person's nutritional needs when consumed at recommended levels. That is why soy is considered a complete protein.

Soy is an excellent source of fiber: One cup of boiled soy beans provides six grams of dietary fiber, including both soluble and insoluble fiber.

Soybeans are rich in isoflavones, which along with soy protein, have been shown in clinical trials to reduce serum cholesterol and promote heart health. The FDA in 1999 gave soy its stamp of approval to the claim that "25 grams of soy protein per day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease."

Isoflavones found in soy can help reduce post-menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, help improve bone density and provide important antioxidant capabilities.

Research studies have shown that soy like other protein-based diets are beneficial for effective weight loss and help combat problems stemming from being overweight, such as diabetes and high cholesterol. Studies also indicate that soy protein helps increase lean muscle mass developments and muscle strength.

The soybean is both good for the body and for the planet. About 25 times more protein is produced by an acre of land devoted to a soy bean crop than to beef production - a notable figure given the critical need to find efficient use of land and water globally.

Today those nations where people consume large amounts of soy in their diet, report much lower incidence of many of the chronic diseases that are targets of public health policy in the US.

Feed the hungry: The soy bean is an inexpensive, high-quality complete protein, which could be useful in feeding underprivileged people around the world and undernourished children in America.

Soy is big business. The U.S. is the world’s largest soy bean producer and exports a large percentage. Soy foods are fast becoming mainstream: in the year 2000 over 2,000 soy-based products were on the market and the number is growing by 10% each year. Soy food sales have doubled from $1.5 billion in 1997 to $3.2 billion in 2001.

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