



With more than 74 million acres planted, the United States is the world's largest producer of soybeans. The American Soybean Association is the policy, domestic marketing, new uses, research and international marketing advocate of the U.S. soybean farmer. (ASA photo by Bob Callanan) Inset: A shipment of 55,000 metric ton of U.S. soybeans is unloaded at the port of Dalian in northern China. Half the value of the U.S. soybean crop is exported, and China is now the largest export customer for U.S. soybeans. (ASA photo by Bob Callanan)

ASA Continues 85-Year Tradition

On a hot summer day in 1920, a group of soybean farmers and extension workers in Camden, Indiana, founded the National Soybean Growers Association in an effort to promote the crop and increase profit opportunities. Renamed the American Soybean Association (ASA) in 1929, the Association has continued these important efforts for 85 years.

Early soybeans presented farmers with production and marketing challenges. Gold, green, black, brown and mottled seeds grew on plants ranging from ground hugging vines to leggy stalks. Plants were difficult to harvest and pods shattered easily. The small, uncertain supply made many processors unwilling to crush the beans. Feed manufacturers and customers were leery of using the soybean meal and cake in animal rations.

Through the ASA, these early soybean farmers obtained an agreement that processors would underwrite the production

of 50,000 acres at a guaranteed minimum price. With processors guaranteed a supply and farmers assured of a market, production increased.

During the 1930s, surpluses of wheat and cotton made soybeans an attractive cash crop. New processing methods created more acceptable meal and oil products, and demand for edible fats and oils encouraged research on soybean oil for food uses. Soybean meal proved to be an important ingredient for balancing animal rations. Europe began importing American soybeans and in 1936 the Chicago Board of Trade established a soybean futures contract.

WWII Cuts U.S. Supplies

The U.S. was importing 40 percent of its fats and oils when World War II cut off supplies. Soybean producers doubled production and processors built plants to produce the oil. But the end of the war brought surpluses, so ASA initiated a series of market development activities. ASA also

launched legislative battles to remove barriers restricting the sale of margarine, which is made from soybean oil.

By 1949, the U.S. began to turn from being a net importer of oils, proteins and oilseeds to a net exporter. Soybean Association leaders traveled as technical advisors on government missions to survey potential markets for U.S. agricultural products. They were convinced that Europe and Japan had the plants, machinery, equipment, know how and the need to use American soybean products in large quantities.

Passage of P.L. 480, Food for Peace program in 1954, made it possible for government and private groups to cooperate in funding market development through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and in 1956, ASA and FAS signed the first joint market development contracts for work in Europe and Japan. With this funding, ASA opened its first international office in Tokyo.