

# American Agriculture Has History of Innovation

**F**rom the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, to the development of the first light tractor in 1926, to the introduction of minimum tillage methods designed to enhance yields while lessening soil erosion in the 1980s, American agriculture has led the world in new developments.

The food and agriculture industry's practice of actively seeking out new ideas, production methods and technologies is really what has helped advance American agriculture and has made it the economic and production power it is.

Consider these facts. The American food and agriculture system represents 16 percent of our nation's gross national

product and generates an estimated 21 million jobs. One American farmer/rancher provides enough food and fiber for 128 people — 94 in the United States and 34 abroad.

And the United States is the world's largest exporter of ag products. In 1991 we exported \$37.6 billion in farm products.

Let us also reflect on the important role agriculture plays in the life of America. It is our most basic industry, our bedrock, and the key to our continued strength. Without a strong agriculture, we cannot have a strong America.

On the next few pages is a historical timeline of American agriculture industry milestones.

**1790**

90 percent of Americans were gainfully employed in agriculture.



**1793**

The cotton gin was invented.

**1834**

The McCormick reaper was patented, which reduced the workload of farmers harvesting grains.



**1837**

John Deere and Leonard Andrus began manufacturing steel plows. A practical threshing machine was patented.

**1849-1926**

Luther Burbank became a leading force in the development of plant breeding as a modern science. He developed more than 800 new strains and varieties of plants.



**1860**

There were more than 2 million farms in the United States, about as many as exist today.

**1860-1943**

The son of a slave, George Washington Carver dedicated his life to improving Southern agriculture. His work resulted in the development of more than 300 products from peanuts and 100 from sweet potatoes.



**1862**

President Abraham Lincoln signed the act authorizing a

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The department was headed by a Commissioner rather than a cabinet-level secretary until 1889. Issac Newton, a Pennsylvania farmer, served as the first Commissioner of Agriculture.



**1862**

Passage of the Homestead Act encouraged development of the West. The Morrill Land Grant College Act was passed.

**1862-75**

American agriculture switched from handpower to horsepower.



**1874**

Georgia set up the first state department of agriculture.

**1875**

Agricultural experiment stations were established in Connecticut and California.



**1887**

The Hatch Experiment Station Act was signed. It provided federal grants for agricultural research studies and a cooperative bond between USDA and the nation's land grant colleges.

**1906**

The first county agricultural agent was appointed.



**1914**

The Smith-Lever Act was signed, providing for cooperative administration of Extension work by USDA and the state agricultural colleges.

**1926**

The first hybrid seed corn company was organized. The first light tractor was developed.



# Growing Better Every Day

It has been said that no democracy can exist until all its participants are fed. Recent events in many parts of the world, particularly in the former Soviet Union, provide dramatic evidence of this.

As these countries engage in the struggle for freedom and democracy, they are hampered by the unrelenting demands on their natural resources. Perhaps most significantly, they are hampered by the inability to feed their people.

The United States has provided humanitarian food assistance and millions of dollars in farm credits. In addition, our government has implemented a number of technical assistance, training and exchange programs to help develop the agricultural and ag business sectors in the region.

Such world events illustrate the importance of a strong agriculture base. They also underscore how fortunate we are in America. We have an agriculture system that, while representing only 0.3 percent of the world's ag labor force, produces 40 percent of the world's corn, 50 percent of the world's soybeans, 25 percent of the world's beef and 11 percent of the world's pork. A system that, in 1991, exported \$37.6 billion worth of farm products, cutting our deficit in non-farm trade by about 14 percent.

Across America, the more than 21 million men and women who provide the food and fiber U.S. consumers depend on every day will be honored during the 20th anniversary of

**1933**

The Farm Credit Administration was established.

**1935**

Congress declared soil erosion a national menace and directed USDA to establish the Soil Conservation Service.

**1935**

The Rural Electrification Administration was established.

**1938**

The Agricultural Adjustment Act became the first law to provide direct price support for basic commodities through a non-recourse loan program. It included payment limitations of \$10,000 and has remained as a base for price support and adjustment legislation.



**1955**

USDA launched a comprehensive rural development program for the first time.

**1959**

Legislation was approved authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a food stamp program.



**1960**

Productivity gains and mechanization in American agriculture reduced the number of farmers by half in a 20-year period, while farm output increased by more than 50 percent.

**1966**

High Lysine corn was developed. It was bred to enhance protein values of grain.



**1970**

The Agricultural Act passed, initiating a cropland set-aside program for producers of wheat, feed grains and upland cotton.

**1970**

Norman Borlaug, ag scientist and plant pathologist, won the Nobel Prize for Peace for the development of semi-dwarf wheats that dramatically increased crop yields. He was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the Green Revolution—the ag technological advances that promised to alleviate world hunger.



**1976**

The Beef Research & Information Act was approved. It enabled cattle producers to establish, finance and carry out a coordinated program of research, producer and consumer information for improving, maintaining and developing markets for beef cattle and beef products.



**1974**

The average farm size increased from 174 acres in 1940 to 385 acres in 1974.



**1977**

The Food & Agriculture Act was passed to provide price and income protection for farmers and an abundance of food and fiber at reasonable prices to consumers.

National Agriculture Day — March 20 — and National Agriculture Week — March 14-20.

The 20th anniversary theme, “American Agriculture— Growing Better Every Day,” conveys the message that America’s food and agriculture system is a progressive, forward-thinking industry that is continuously striving to improve its methods and better respond to consumer needs and trends.

“Without a national observance, it’s too easy to forget the important role the American food and agriculture industry plays in our daily lives,” says Keith Nelson, chairman of the Agriculture Council of America and coordinator of the nationwide celebration. “We tend to take for granted the very industry that puts food on our table, clothes on our back and

shelter over our heads every day. National Agriculture Week provides an opportunity for all Americans to take a moment and reflect upon the many ways agriculture touches their lives.”

**The Agriculture Council** of America is once again providing activity kits designed to promote National Ag Day and Ag Week for use by everyone involved in the food and agriculture industry. These kits include speeches, press releases, ag facts, posters, logos and public service advertisements.

For further information, contact Agriculture Council of America, 927 15th Street, N.W., Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005; (202) 682-9200.



### 1979

An American Agriculture Movement (AAM) tractorcade of farmers, most of whom were grain producers, arrived in Washington D.C., to lobby Congress and the Carter Administration for higher prices.

### 1981

U.S. ag exports reached a peak of \$43.8 billion for the year. Their subsequent decline helped touch off a farm financial crisis in the early and mid-1980s due to lower prices and high farm debt.



### 1984

Americans become more conscious of fatty foods in their diets as a result of a series of nutrition studies in the United States, Finland and Italy. Their research studies suggested that fats can increase blood pressure and heart attack rates.

### 1987

Farmland values bottomed out after a six-year decline, signaling a turn-around in the farm economy.



### 1989

Aiming to retire some 45 million acres of highly erodible farmland by 1990, the Federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) created by the 1985 Food Security Act was on schedule. Farmers set aside 30 million acres, breaking the record of 28.7 million acres retired under the 1956 Soil Bank Program.

Source: USDA



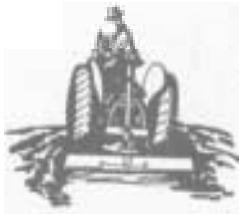
### 1980

In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter suspended all agricultural trade to the Soviet Union in excess of 8 million tons of grain that the United States was committed to sell under the 1975 U.S./U.S.S.R. grain agreement.

### 1983

Secretary of Agriculture John Block announced a Payment-In-Kind (PIK) program to reduce surplus stocks of price-supported commodities. This, along with related measures, was the largest acreage reduction program in U.S. history.

# PIK



### 1985

Minimum tillage methods of preparing land for planting were used by more farmers on a variety of crops. The objective is to enhance yields while reducing erosion.



### 1988

Responding to the farm credit crisis, President Reagan signed into law the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987, which provided funds to lending institutions to bolster their financial stability.

### 1989

The Soviet Union is the leading grain buyer in fiscal 1989, purchasing 21.7 million tons of wheat and corn valued at nearly \$3 billion. It was part of a general rebound for U.S. farm exports.



### 1986

USDA scientists developed techniques for transferring blocks of genes from one plant cell to another.