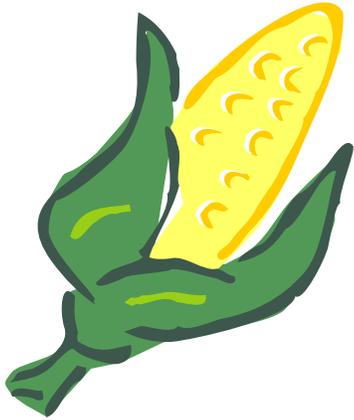


Name \_\_\_\_\_



## A Brief History of Corn

Since ancient times, corn has played an integral role in human history. Corn is in the grass family, and it is native to the Americas. The exact origin of the grain remains unknown, but tiny ears of corn have been discovered at ancient village sites and in tombs of early Native Americans. Evidence of corn in central Mexico, where it was domesticated from a wild grass, suggests it was used there as long as 7,000 years ago. Cultivated corn is known to have existed in the southwestern United States for at least 3,000 years.

To the Aztecs in Mexico, corn was a staple of their diet that provided flour and vegetable dishes. Here in the United States, many different Native American tribes have traditionally grown corn—also known as maize—and used it for both food and utilitarian purposes. Corn was so important to some Pueblo tribes of the Southwest that it was considered one of the three sacred foods (along with beans and squash), so sacred that some groups even worshipped it. Indeed, Native American mythology is rich with stories involving corn and important religious events. Eastern tribes shared their knowledge of corn production with the early European settlers, saving many colonists from starvation.

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### Use of Corn

Along with wheat and rice, corn is one of the world's major grain crops. It is the largest grain crop grown in the United States today, and the United States is the largest producer of corn in the world. Corn is used as food for humans and as feed for livestock. Many American foods come from corn. We eat the kernels of sweet corn right off the cob and heat popcorn kernels for a tasty snack. Dent corn (also called field corn) can be processed and separated into its different components to make corn-based sweetener, starch, meal, and oil, which are used in a wide variety of foods.

Corn cobs have been used as a soft-grit abrasive and to provide furfural, a liquid required in the manufacturing of nylon fibers. Corn has been used as a source for producing biodegradable plastics. Additionally, ethanol (a type of renewable fuel made from corn) has shown the possibility of becoming a major new fuel for the world's automotive industry. From foods of the past to fuels of the future, this highly diverse crop has played a major role in human civilization.

### Corn Production

As miraculous as the many uses for corn may be, the way corn develops and grows into a productive plant is equally fascinating. To understand the vast amount of seed produced by corn plants, consider the following example: A single seed (kernel) can produce a plant that will contain at least 600 kernels per ear. On one acre of land, anywhere from 22,000 to 35,000 individual plants may be grown. In general, hybrid corn varieties produce one to two ears per plant. If each plant produces at least one ear of corn, the yield will be 13,000,000 (thirteen million) kernels of corn from that single acre. A 400-acre farm would then yield over five billion kernels. In addition, consider that US corn yields have increased more than 500% since the early 1900s. With the development of technologies like hybrid corn varieties, synthetic fertilizers, and new farm machinery, more corn can be produced on less land than ever before.