



# The Soybean Surge: North Dakota's Agricultural Revolution

Once a peripheral crop with little footprint in the state's vast agricultural tapestry, soybeans have since undergone a transformation, marking a staggering 60-fold increase for production since 1980. Today, North Dakota proudly stands as a

leader in U.S. soybean production, consistently ranking in the top five states for acreage and hosting four of the top-ten soybean-acreage counties nationwide. This remarkable growth not only underscores the crop's economic significance, but also highlights the strides in agronomic science and market

demand that have propelled North Dakota to the forefront of the soybean industry.

Jena Bjertness, the director of market development for the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC), sheds light on this incredible journey.

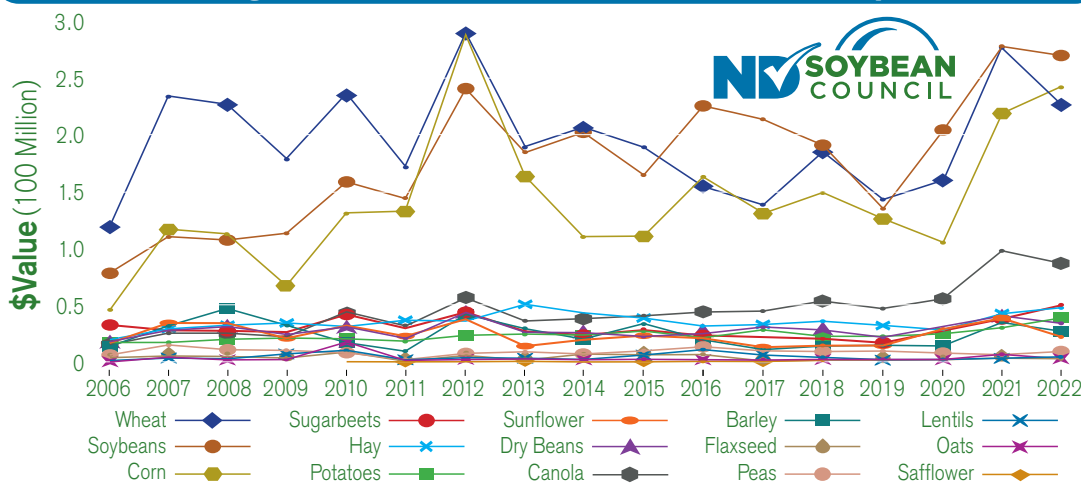
"I think growth has been driven

by genetics improving over the years to make varieties capable of thriving in North Dakota's climate, coupled with an ever-increasing demand from local and global markets," Bjertness says.

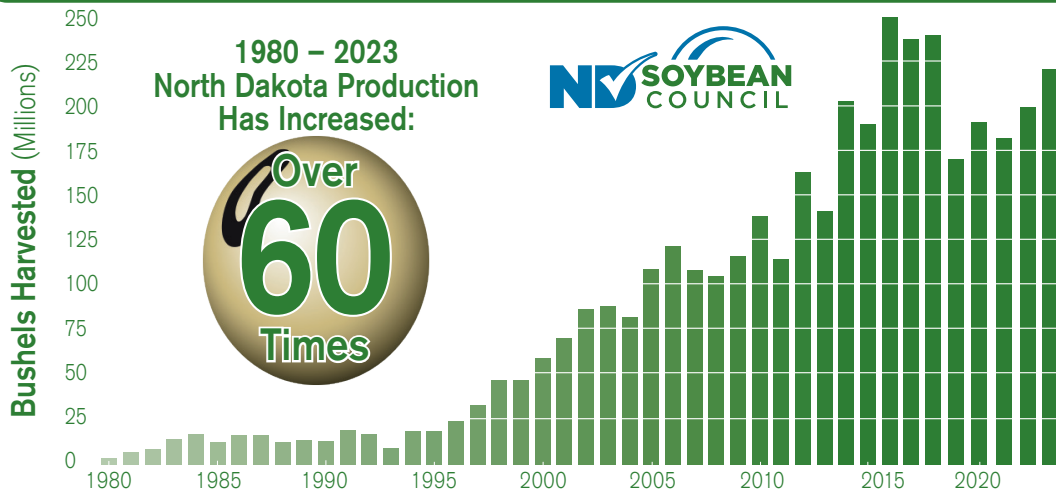
The recent establishment of crush plants, including the first in Stutsman County and another upcoming in Casselton, signifies a demand shift that is set to further elevate North Dakota's status in the soybean sector.

Soybean growth in the state is not only a tale of quantity, but also of quality. The NDSC works with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the Northern Crops Institute (NCI) to conduct an annual Soybean Quality Survey, delving into metrics such as crude protein, essential amino acids, fatty-acid profiles and soluble sugars. This analysis provides buyers with a rich

## Farmgate Value of North Dakota Crops



# North Dakota Soybean Production



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Sources: NASS

dataset that underscores the quality of North Dakota’s soybeans, particularly the high concentration of essential amino acids, which are critical for livestock nutrition.

“Essential amino acid concentrations have been a big selling point with our buyers, especially with overseas feeders of livestock like poultry, swine and aquaculture,” Bjertness states. “But it’s taken a marketing shift to educate buyers about why these acids are important.”

Bjertness adds that, when soybeans have fewer essential amino acids to make up the crude protein,

the crop has more nonessential amino acids. Essential amino acids are required for animals to consume through feed, so these are most important to animal feeders.

“You may get more bang for your buck if you’re going to formulate based on essential amino acids and formulate to the requirement of the animal versus a more generic measurement like crude protein,” Bjertness adds.

In terms of economics, the influence of soybeans in North Dakota has been profound. For four consecutive years, they’ve

reigned as the highest production value crop in the state, with a value of \$2.7 billion in 2023. This figure, impressive as it is, merely scratches the surface of the soybeans’ economic effect, which amplifies as the crop is processed into various products, including soybean meal and oil.

The latter has seen a remarkable reevaluation in recent years, transitioning from a byproduct to a highly sought-after commodity due to the increased demand for renewable diesel.

“In the past, what’s driven the

value of a soybean is soybean meal,” Bjertness asserts. “What we’ve seen in the last four years is that the value of soybean is now driven by soybean oil, which used to be a byproduct. We have more demand for that oil than we could ever fill, so it’s been a huge shift.”

The continued expansion of crush plants within the state heralds a new era of growth and opportunity for North Dakota’s soybean farmers. With each passing year, the state cements its role as a pivotal player in the global soybean market.

As the North Dakota Soybean Council continues to lead with cutting-edge research and market development initiatives, the future of soybeans in North Dakota shines bright, promising continued growth, sustainability and economic prosperity for the farmers and the global community they serve.

—Story and photo by staff

**For more info and to review the latest Soybean Quality Report, scan the QR**

