



If the smell of buckwheat cakes wafts through your house on Sunday morning, or buckwheat groats are turning up on your plate in place of rice, you're probably part of the buckwheat revival.

Though buckwheat originated in Central Asia, it's been grown in America since colonial times.

Primarily used for buckwheat pancakes and as a livestock feed through the years, its popularity almost came to an end in the 1960's with our tendency to eat less starchy foods and ones without such a strong flavor as buckwheat. In addition, modern farm machinery permitted quicker planting of other crops, meaning farmers are less dependent on quick-maturing crops like buckwheat.

With buckwheat's revival in the 1970's has come other uses for this nutritious food.

Buckwheat flour can not only be used for pancakes, but in

bread and other baked goods to add a darker color.

Buckwheat groats—the hulled kernel—can be used as a substitute for rice and as a stuffing for turkey or chicken.

Groats can be marketed whole, cracked, or as a coarse granular product. It's also used for breakfast food, porridge, and as a thickener for soups, gravies, and dressings.

Buckwheat's never been a terribly important grain (actually, it's not even a true grain), but when it was at its U.S. peak in 1866, production reached 22 million bushels. Demand, however, steadily fell off as breakfast habits changed and as farmers found other feed crops more satisfactory. By 1969, buckwheat production had reached a record low of less than three-quarters of a million bushels.

But the advent of the 1970's saw an upsurge in buckwheat consumption. The cause is twofold:

new buckwheat products such as ready-to-eat cereal plus increased interest in "natural" foods. As a "natural" food, buckwheat rates high in nutritional value, equal or above many other cereals or seeds.

Today, you'll find buckwheat groats and straight buckwheat flour displayed prominently among the "natural" foods—while not many years ago it was hidden in an obscure corner in stores.

Buckwheat pancake mix continues as the most popular food use of buckwheat and contains about 40 per cent buckwheat flour in addition to wheat

and other flours. Most recently, there's been the introduction of ready-to-eat buckwheat cereal.

In fact, buckwheat has been doing so well in the seventies that domestic production can't keep up with demand, necessitating large imports.

However, the solution to the production problem is not as simple as planting additional acreage.

Buckwheat faces stiff competition for acreage from other crops, and at present, can't really compete in terms of income to farmers.

Its yield-per-acre hasn't changed much in 20 years while corn's has gone up 100 per cent, wheat's 80 per cent, and oats'—one of buckwheat's main competitors for acreage, nearly 70 per cent. Thus, farmers can get far greater yield, and often farm more money, from other crops.

And because of the nature of the plant—it's cross-pollinated and can't be inbred—it is not well adapted to plant breeding

research. But without increased research efforts, the yield-per-acre standstill probably won't be overcome.

Now, buckwheat is often planted only after the farmer has failed in his efforts to plant other crops. To get enough buckwheat at reasonable prices, some buyers contract acreage.

In the past 20 years, U.S. buckwheat production fell from 4.4 million bushels (1950) to 678,000 bushels (1969). Acreage has dipped from 253,000 acres to 39,000.

Historically, the leading buckwheat States have been New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

While New York continues to be first, its production has dropped from 1.5 million bushels in 1950 to 216,000 in 1969. Harvested area shrank from more than 70,000 to 14,000 acres.

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania's production has dropped even more dramatically. It's gone

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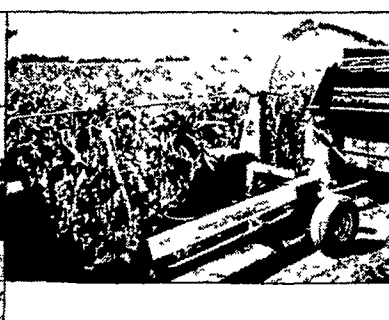
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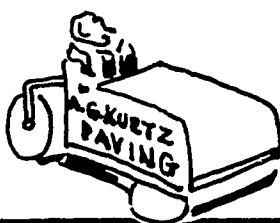
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