

Mexicans look to soybeans for protein boost

MEXICO, D.F. — The Mexican government is working to improve the nutrition levels of the nation's 70 million people.

To help in their effort government leaders often call on the American Soybean Association to provide information and technical assistance in the use of soy protein. Their

requests have resulted in benefits to the Mexican consumer through improved diets and to U.S. soybean producers who now have an expanding new market for their crop.

One such request for ASA assistance came in 1977 when Manuel Bernardo Aguirre, Governor of the state of Chihuahua invited

Gil Harrison, ASA's Latin American director, to make presentations to community leaders in major towns and cities of his state. Harrison contacted Felipe Suberbie, general manager of Industrial de Alimentos, a Mexico City manufacturer of soy-food products; who, at his own expense, immediately offered to send a

sales manager and a cook with Harrison to Chihuahua.

"We gave a total of five presentations to dietitians, nutritionists and doctors and nurses of the Social Security Institute, the Child Protection Institute hospitals and restaurants," says Harrison. "Following the sessions I met with Governor Aguirre and one of his aides. Together we prepared a step by step program for the establishment of a full-fat soy flour plant using a simple U.S.-made extruder and a flour grinding mill.

"In our original planning we were well aware that the market for human consumption of soy foods did not exist and that it would take an educational effort to show people the benefits of soy in their diets," explains Harrison.

"With this in mind, I made all the economic calculations for the plant based on the utilization of the full-fat flour for poultry feed. We felt that as demand for higher-priced human food use increased the plant would show increasing profits and more of the production could be diverted from animal to human food uses.

"Based on the plan we submitted, the governor authorized 6 million pesos to build the plant," says Harrison.

"Poultry producers in the area were willing to purchase the initial production as ASA-sponsored experiments in other areas of

the country had shown the advantages of using full-fat soya meal for broilers.

In March of 1978 Mexico's President, Jose Lopez Portillo, demonstrating his interest in state soya projects, personally inaugurated the Chihuahua soybean processing plant. (Recently, he returned to the city to inaugurate a new production line that makes a blend of soya with cows' milk.)

"In the beginning only about five percent of the plant's production went for human consumption as full-fat soya flour, which was sold retail in one kilogram packages to bakers and meat packers," says Harrison.

He proudly points out, however, that today well over 50 percent of the plant's production is devoted to products for human consumption.

"The principal product is a blend of soya flour with 'pinole' (ground, roasted corn with brown sugar) which is distributed in 50-pound bags at very low cost to the Tarahumara Indians in the mountains of Chihuahua," he explains.

"Also a tortilla flour enriched with 8 percent full-

fat soya flour, is being sold at a subsidized price to low income groups.

"The development of new soya products to suit Mexican tastes is important too," says Harrison. Recently the Chihuahua plant developed and began marketing a new weaning food called "Soyavena," a soya-oatmeal blend that will greatly improve child nutrition in the area.

"As a result of this initial project, other states in Mexico have also become interested in this plant and are requesting technical assistance from the government," says Harrison.

He points out that although the total soya used is small, amounting to some 130 tons a month, the potential for increased usage is tremendous.

"What counts is that the usage of soya is growing and the potential is very great. The people of Mexico eat 10 million tons of corn and three million tons of wheat each year," he says.

"At a level of only five percent enrichment, the consumption of soya could be elevated considerably in Mexico in the years ahead."

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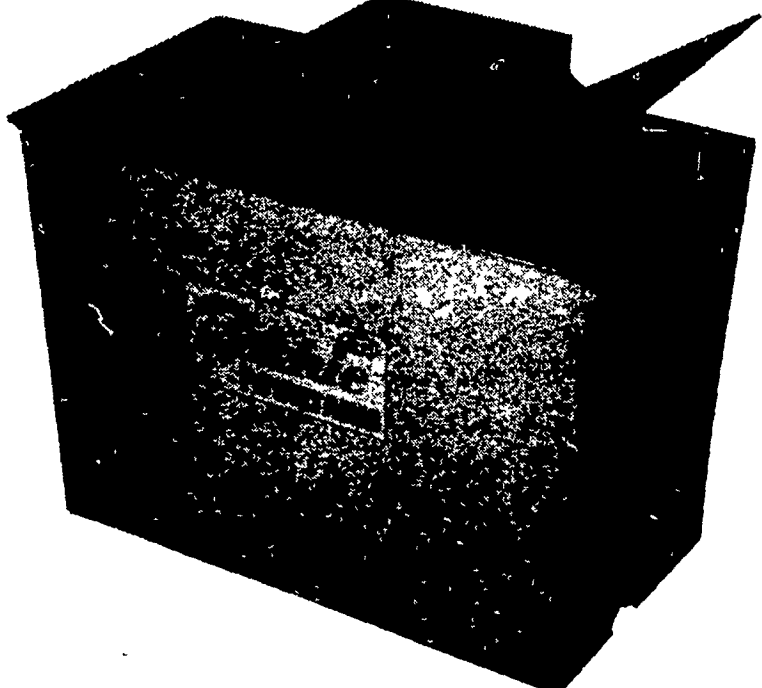
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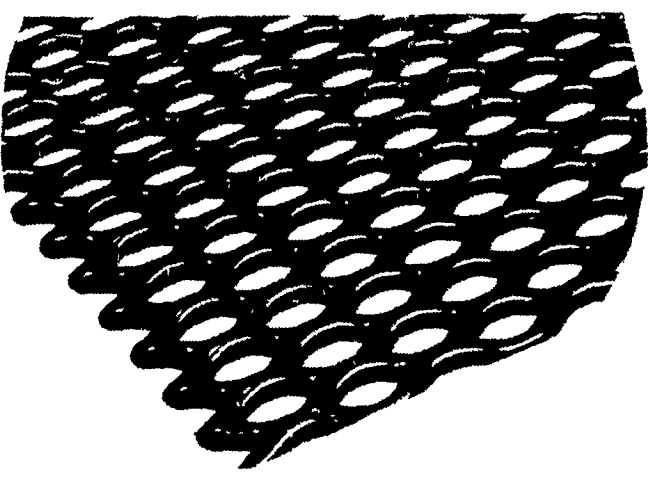
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