



Canada's Agriculture, Food and Beverage INDUSTRY

● Canada's ● Sunflower Seed ● Industry

Canada produces both confectionery and oilseed varieties of sunflower seed, and is a competitive partner in the growing international market for this special crop. Despite its small production and exports volume, Canada exports nearly half of its production. The hardy sunflower has a wide range of uses, from the confectionary and baking industries, to the birdseed industry, to the animal feed industry.

Sunflower seeds pack a strong nutritional wallop. They contain almost every vitamin (except Vitamin C) and substantial amounts of key minerals, including magnesium, iron, copper and zinc. In addition, the protein content of sunflower seeds is so high, they can serve as a meat substitute. The confectionery variety is considered to be one of the healthiest snack foods available. Sunflower seeds, particularly the black oil-type, are also the favourite of most seed-eating birds.

There is a growing market for Canadian-grown sunflower seed. Oil sunflower seeds are marketed primarily to the North American birdseed industry and include bulk shipments as well as cleaned and bagged product. Confection sunflower seeds are popular in Canada and in many countries of the Western hemisphere. Confectionery sunflower seeds fall into three categories: in shell, kernel and birdseed. Larger sunflower seeds (in shell) are roasted, salted and packaged for human consumption and are classified as either large or jumbo. Medium-sized seeds (kernel) are de-hulled and also packaged for human consumption. These are primarily used by the bakery industry, but are also traded domestically and exported. Smaller seeds, known as "striped birdfood," are sold in North American birdseed markets.



The black-shelled oilseed variety is richer in oil and therefore better suited to the production of sunflower oil. It is also used to produce ingredients for animal feed. Compared with other vegetable oils and animal fats, the oil in sunflower seed is very high in polyunsaturated fatty acids, making it easily digestible and provides a good option when choosing cooking oil, particularly if high cholesterol is a concern.

Because of a deep tap root system, sunflowers are very adaptable and can be harvested even after an early snowfall, without reduction in quality. This adaptability makes them a viable alternative to grains in the southern parts of the Canadian Prairies. Production in northern Canada is limited because of the colder climate.

Most sunflower research in Canada is done by the private sector, with some government research conducted in Brooks, Winnipeg and Morden in Manitoba. Research is focused on developing dwarf, short-season varieties such as Sunola™ which are well suited to the cooler farming climates of northern Canada.





With the development of higher-yield hybrid varieties, new herbicides and improved crop management techniques the volume of sunflower seed production has grown considerably. In 1997, production of sunflower seed was 65,000 tonnes. This value increased in 1998 to 112,000 tonnes and in 1999 to approximately 122,000 tonnes. Production decreased slightly in 2000 to 119,000 tonnes and again in 2001 to 98,000 tonnes. In 2002, production of sunflower seed increased over 60 per cent to 157,000 tonnes essentially due to increase of the production area.

Additional information

The sunflower is an annual broadleaf plant that grows well in most regions of Canada, but flourishes in the southern portions of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It is the only oilseed native to the northern Great Plains of North America and has been grown commercially in Canada since the early 1940s.

Canada is the tenth largest exporter and twenty-fourth largest producer of sunflower seeds in the world. The United States is by far the largest importer of Canadian sunflower seeds with 85 per cent of total Canadian exports in 2002.

For more detailed information

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Further information on products, suppliers and investment opportunities in the Canadian agri-food industry is available on the Agri-Food Trade Service Web site at: <http://ats.agr.ca>.

Canada's food and beverage industry is recognized internationally as being among the best in the world, both in terms of ensuring food safety and quality, and in providing a trade friendly environment. Consumers are more aware of food security, safety and quality, and are demanding more information about how their food is produced. More than ever, consumers want to know that their food is safe and that it has been produced in an environmentally responsible manner.

Canada's objective is to be the world leader in food safety, innovation, and environmentally responsible production and to be the best at meeting the needs of consumers at home and abroad.