

# Staple Food Crops of the World

Where are some of the world's staple crops grown?

For the complete mapmaker interactive with media resources, visit:

<http://education.nationalgeographic.org/maps/wbt-staple-food-crops-world/>

A [crop](#) is a plant that can be grown and [harvested](#) for [food](#) or [profit](#). By use, crops fall into six categories: food crops, [feed crops](#), [fiber crops](#), [oil crops](#), [ornamental crops](#), and [industrial crops](#).

[Food crops](#), such as fruits, vegetables, and [grains](#), are harvested to feed the more than 7 billion people on Earth. [Climate](#), [accessibility](#), [trade](#), and [culture](#) are just some of the [geographic factors](#) that influence the popularity of a food crop in a given region. Grains, such as corn, wheat, and rice, are the world's most popular food crops. In fact, these crops are often the basis for food staples.

A [food staple](#) is a food that makes up the dominant part of a population's diet. Food staples are eaten regularly—even daily—and supply a major proportion of a person's energy and nutritional needs.

Cassava, maize, plantains, potatoes, rice, sorghum, soybeans, sweet potatoes, wheat, and yams are some of the leading food crops around the world. These layers of our MapMaker Interactive display how many tons of these crops were produced per country as an average from 2010 to 2012.

As you look through the different map layers on food crops, keep in mind that these crops don't always feed people near where they are grown. Crops grown in one place might be [exported](#) to another, and where those crops were grown from 2010 to 2012 does not reflect where they were produced historically or even where they might grow in the future. A [map](#), among many things, is a [temporary](#) portrait of a changing world.

## Questions

- Where do you think a staple crop is consumed in the same area in which it was harvested?

**It varies depending on the crop:** Rice, for instance, is largely produced and consumed in Asia. So are yams and plantains in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- Domestication is the process of adapting wild plants and animals for human use. Do you know where today's food crops were originally domesticated?
  - **Wheat and other cereals** (such as rye and barley) occurred in the **Fertile Crescent**.
  - **The Americas** contributed to the domestication of **maize (Mexico), cassava (Brazil), potatoes (the Andes region), and sweet potatoes (South America)**.
  - **Africans** first domesticated **sorghum and yams**.

- **Rice and soybeans** were domesticated in **East Asia**, while various species of **yams and plantains** were domesticated in **Southeast Asia**.
- By use, crops fall into six categories: food crops, feed crops, fiber crops, oil crops, ornamental crops, and industrial crops. Can you give an example of each one of these crops?

**Rice** is a leading **food** crop.

**Corn** is a leading **feed** crop.

**Cotton** is a leading **fiber** crop.

**Soybeans** are a leading **oil** crop.

**Flowers** are a leading **ornamental** crop.

**Tobacco** is a leading **industrial** crop.

## Fast Facts

- Croplands cover 1.53 billion hectares on Earth, which is about 12% of Earth's ice-free land.
- Cereals account for more than half of the world's harvested area. Cereals are grain-producing grasses, such as wheat, rice, maize, and millet. Of the 2.3 billion tons of cereal produced, about a billion tons are destined for food use, 750 million tons for animal feed, and the remaining 500 million tons is either processed for industrial use, used as seed, or wasted.
- Rice is the primary crop and food staple of more than half the world's population. Asia is the world's largest rice-producing and rice-consuming region. Rice is also becoming an increasing food staple throughout Africa.
- More of Earth's surface is covered by wheat than by any other food crop, despite it trailing maize and rice in the sheer amount of tons harvested. About 65% of wheat harvested is used for food, 17% for animal feed, 12% for industrial use such as biofuels, and the rest for various uncategorized uses.
- Plantains and bananas belong to the same genus; the primary difference between the plants is that plantains tend to be cooked or processed prior to consumption, whereas bananas are often eaten raw. Plantains, which fruit year-round, are major staples in West and Central Africa, the Caribbean, and coastal South America.
- Yams are a major staple in West Africa, where they are consumed mainly as "fufu," a gelatinous dough. Fufu can also be made from cassava and plantains.
- Approximately 75% of the world's agricultural land is devoted to raising animals, including cropland devoted to animal feed and pasture for grazing land.

## Vocabulary

<b>Term</b> <b>Term</b>	<b>Part of</b> <b>Part of</b> <b>Speech</b> <b>Speech</b>	<b>Definition</b> <b>Definition</b>
<b>accessibility</b>	<i>noun</i>	the ease with which a place or thing can be reached from other places.
<b>climate</b>	<i>noun</i>	all weather conditions for a given location over a period of time.
<b>crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	agricultural produce.
<b>culture</b>	<i>noun</i>	learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.
<b>export</b>	<i>verb</i>	to transport goods to another place for trade.
<b>factor</b>	<i>noun</i>	element contributing to an event or outcome.
<b>feed crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	plants grown and harvested for livestock or other animal consumption.
<b>Fertile Crescent</b>	<i>noun</i>	region extending from the eastern Mediterranean coast through Southwest Asia to the Persian Gulf.
<b>fiber crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	plants grown and harvested for use in making textile and paper products.
<b>food</b>	<i>noun</i>	material, usually of plant or animal origin, that living organisms use to obtain nutrients.
<b>food crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	plants grown and harvested for human consumption.
<b>food staple</b>	<i>noun</i>	food that is eaten frequently, either fresh or stored for use all year.
<b>geographic</b>	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with places and the relationships between people and their environments.
<b>grain</b>	<i>noun</i>	harvested seed of such grasses as wheat, oats, and rice.
<b>harvest</b>	<i>noun</i>	the gathering and collection of crops, including both plants and animals.
<b>industrial crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	plants grown and harvested for use in making products, rather than for food.
<b>map</b>	<i>noun</i>	symbolic representation of selected characteristics of a place, usually drawn on a flat surface.
<b>oil crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	plants grown and harvested to be processed and broken down into solids and oils, and the oils used for food or industrial purposes.
<b>ornamental crop</b>	<i>noun</i>	plants grown and harvested for landscape gardening.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>plant</b>	<i>noun</i>	organism that produces its own food through photosynthesis and whose cells have walls.
<b>produce</b>	<i>noun</i>	agricultural products such as vegetables and fruits.
<b>profit</b>	<i>noun</i>	money earned after production costs and taxes are subtracted.
<b>temporary</b>	<i>adjective</i>	not lasting or permanent.
<b>trade</b>	<i>noun</i>	buying, selling, or exchanging of goods and services.

### **Articles & Profiles**

- [National Geographic Education: crop](#)
- [National Geographic Education: food staple](#)

### **Worksheets & Handouts**

- [Food and Agriculture Organization: Production](#)



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