

ELEMENTARY ARTICLE: What Can You Do With a Field of Corn?

Corn, like all plants, is full of energy. It gets its energy from the sun. Plants take in light energy from the sun and turn it into sugars. They store the sugars in their roots, leaves, stems, and flowers. The energy in the sugars makes them grow. When people or animals eat the corn, the sugars give them energy.

Corn is a member of the grass family. It is a native grain of the Americas. Corn was first grown by Mayan, Aztec, and Inca Indians more than 5,600 years ago. The Indians chewed the sugar-filled leaves of the corn plant like we chew gum, ate the fresh ears of corn, and ground dried corn into flour for bread.

The Pilgrims might have died during their first winter in the new country if the Native Americans hadn't given them corn. The Native Americans showed the Pilgrims how to grow corn and make it into bread, soup, fried corn cakes, and pudding. Corn was so valuable that early settlers used corn to trade with the Native Americans for food and furs.

Today, the United States and the rest of the world use corn primarily as food for livestock. More than half of the corn in the United States is eaten by animals. And much of the food we eat is from corn. We use corn to make breads, popcorn, cereals, and many other foods. And we eat fresh corn on the cob.

Corn has been used for more than animal feed or food for humans for a long time. The British Parliament tried to get American colonists to turn corn into sugar with the Molasses Act in 1733. Today, we use corn syrup and other corn sweeteners in many foods.

Corn has also been used to make alcohol for many years. Native Americans used corn to make beer before the colonists arrived in America. The 1792 Whiskey Rebellion came about when England tried to tax corn whiskey.

Long before the automobile, corn was being turned into an alcohol fuel called **ethanol**. Henry Ford designed his Model T to run on ethanol. He called it the fuel of the future. Ethanol is now being used as a clean-burning fuel for many cars and tractors. Today, about seven percent of the corn grown in the United States is made into ethanol.

Corn plants and other farm waste can be made into a gas called **biogas**. Biogas is full of energy and can be used to cook food, power lights, and heat homes. We can also compost the plants to make fertilizer for our gardens.

Corn is the biggest crop in the United States and is grown all over the world. Corn can grow at altitudes as high as 12,000 feet and as low as sea level. It can grow in tropical climates that get 400 inches of rainfall a year or in areas that get only 12 inches.

The next time you see a field of corn, think about all of the ways we can use its energy. We can feed animals and feed ourselves. We can turn it into ethanol to power vehicles. We can turn it into biogas to make heat and light. Corn is an amazing plant, full of energy we can use.

