

SOY WHAT?

BY ALLISON REYNA



Over the past two decades, the consumption of products derived from soybeans has increased dramatically in the United States. According to the Soyfoods Association of North America, sales of soy food products increased from \$1 billion to over \$5.2 billion from 1996 to 2011. Before the early '90s, it was difficult to find any soy products in the American grocery store, but today, our grocery stores are brimming with soy milk, soy cheese, soy yogurt, soy burgers, soy nuts and soy ice cream. Soy is also found in less obvious products such as crackers, energy bars, soups, salad dressings and chocolate. In fact, over 60 percent of the products sold in supermarkets contain at least one soy ingredient. How did soy go from virtual anonymity to ubiquity so quickly?

According to the Mayo Clinic, soy foods have been in the Asian diet for at least 5,000 years. Miso, soy sauce and tempeh (all fermented soy products) were the most prevalent soy foods, while tofu, which appeared later, was used sparingly in things like miso soup and fish stock. Today, soy is consumed in Asia in many of the same traditional ways—in small amounts, mostly in its natural or fermented state.

According to the book *Eat Your Food* by Aaron Brachfeld and Mary Choate, soybeans were first introduced to America when a sailor brought them home after visiting China in 1765. Large-scale manufacturing didn't begin until World War II, when soybeans were ground up and became a key ingredient in the animal feed given to chickens and pigs. It wasn't until late in the 20th century that food manufacturers increased the diversity of soy products—from soy cheese to soy meats to soy ice cream—and began investing heavily in the marketing of soy.

Soy is high in protein, cholesterol-free and contains no animal fat. Fermented soy products—such as miso, tempeh and soy sauce—have the added bonus of containing natural probiotics, which keep the gut healthy. For these reasons, soy was an easy product to promote—it was cheap, versatile and easy to prepare. Because of this, soy became the health panacea to most major illnesses, including cancer and heart disease. According to the Mayo Clinic's website, it can reduce the risk of arthritis, increase brain function and reduce menopausal symptoms; however, large studies to prove such claims have had conflicting results. Other studies have shown a relationship between high soy consumption and an increased risk of osteoarthritis, breast cancer and thyroid impairment.

Today, soy is one of the top four crops grown in the United States.

The soybean is processed into two separate products: soy protein and soybean oil, which is commonly used in packaged food since it is cheap to manufacture and can be used as a preservative. It's also marketed as a healthier alternative to other oils because of its low saturated

fat content. The protein is heavily manufactured and turned into a variety of other products that are commonly found in processed foods: soy protein isolate, soy protein powder, soy lecithin and more. These ingredients are often used as stabilizers and preservatives in packaged, boxed and canned foods, leading those who are sensitive or allergic to soy to scour nutrition labels with a critical eye.

In fact, soy is one of the top allergenic foods, along with milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish and wheat. Food allergies have become a growing concern in the health world, especially those affecting young children. Last year, the journal *Pediatrics* reported that childhood food allergies have risen 50 percent since 2007, affecting 1 in every 13 children. One theory about food allergies is that people become allergic to those foods that they consume most often. Might this be why soy allergies are so common? Others believe that soy allergies are more common among Westerners because soy is not native to our ancestral diet. And even if consumers are painstakingly avoiding the typical processed soy products and closely examining ingredient labels for soy protein isolate or soybean oil, they still might be consuming soy through meat products, since soy is a key ingredient in animal feed.

Soy formula has also been a popular alternative for babies with dairy allergies and is often recommended as a replacement for cow's milk. In 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics estimated that soy-based formulas accounted for 20 to 25 percent of the formula market. However, like other processed soy products, concerns have been raised about soy formula by health and medical professionals. Dr. William Sears, pediatrician and coauthor of several best-selling baby books, including *The Baby Book*, warns that feeding a baby soy formula before intestinal closure may increase the risk of a soy allergy later in life. Also, soy naturally contains isoflavones, also referred to as phytoestrogens because of their ability to mimic estrogen in the body. According to the National Institutes of Health, animal studies indicate that this may contribute to the early onset of puberty in girls.

Other concerns about soy are the potential health risks from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). According to the USDA, 92

According to the USDA,
92 percent of the soy grown
in this country is genetically
modified

percent of the soy grown in this country is genetically modified. Most countries, including Australia, Japan and all of Europe, require food manufacturers to label products that contain GMOs. Similar to processed soy products, GMOs have become such a ubiquitous part of our food supply so quickly that the medical community is unsure what, if any, the effect on our health is or will be in the future. Under current U.S. regulations, foods containing GMOs do not have to be labeled. To avoid GMOs, consumers must seek out products that are 100 percent organic.

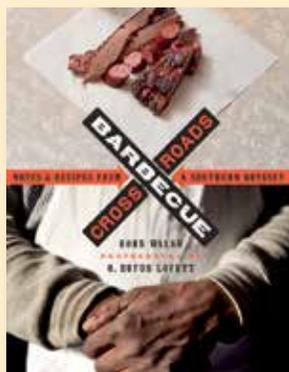
Soy will continue to be a controversial food in the health world. Those not allergic, but still concerned about possible health concerns regarding the consumption of soy, should enjoy it in moderation and seek out fermented, minimally processed, organic forms such as tempeh, miso and soy sauce.

Read more
about these books
online.

UNIVERSITY
OF
TEXAS
PRESS



800.252.3206
www.utexaspress.com



Barbecue Crossroads

Notes and Recipes from a Southern Odyssey

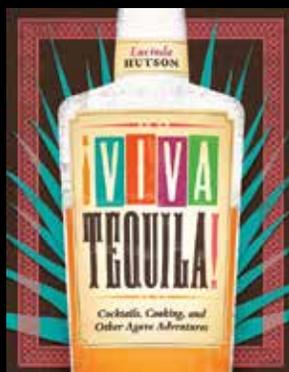
BY ROBB WALSH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY O. RUFUS LOVETT

The James Beard Award-winning author of the best-selling *Legends of Texas Barbecue Cookbook* takes us on an extraordinary odyssey from Texas to the Carolinas and back to tell the story of Southern barbecue, past, present, and future—complete with more than seventy recipes.

144 color photos

\$24.95 PAPERBACK | \$45.00 HARDCOVER | \$24.95 E-BOOK



¡Viva Tequila!

Cocktails, Cooking, and Other Agave Adventures

BY LUCINDA HUTSON

With a festive blend of inspired recipes for fabulous drinks and dishes, lively personal anecdotes, spicy cultural history, and colorful agave folk art, proverbs, and lore, America's premier expert shows us how to savor the most Mexican of all libations, tequila.

150 photos

\$34.95 HARDCOVER | \$34.95 E-BOOK