

Joshua Reed
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Critical Crops Throughout History

To answer “What crops were historically critical to feeding the world and why?” one must first consider what a human nutritionally needs to survive. First and foremost, a human needs a diet that contains sufficient caloric content.

This is why I surmise that crops that were easy to grow, could be cooked for more caloric value, and contained large amounts of starch and some essential proteins were likely the most critical crops for feeding the world throughout history.

According to [In defense of corn, the world's most important food crop](#) an article by Tamar Haspel published by the Washington Post, “corn averages roughly 15 million calories per acre.” As is further discussed, this is extremely high, and this calorie per acre ratio is largely why we here in the US depend so heavily on corn.

Of course throughout history, corn wasn't available everywhere, and it wasn't likely as efficiently grown as it is today. Beyond this, corn alone isn't a complete source of protein. In almost all cases, grains need to be combined with legumes to create a complete protein. This is necessary because meat and other complete protein sources weren't as readily available as they are today.

Putting this all together, crops like nuts, beans, oats, wheat, barley, corn, and rice are probably what have been the most critical crops to feed the world throughout history. The combination of grain and legume has been critical, though specifically which grain and legume varies by culture and region.

Bibliography

Haspel, Tamar “In Defense of Corn, the World's Most Important Food Crop.” *The Washington Post* 12 July 2015. *washingtonpost.com*. Web. 3 Apr. 2017.