



Research in edamame production at Virginia State University provides Virginia farmers with information they need to embrace this potentially lucrative cash crop, which is especially important in light of the tobacco and peanut quota buyouts of the early 2000s.

Edamame to the Rescue?

Who cares and why?

Since the peanut and tobacco quota buyouts of 2002 and 2004, farmers in Southside Virginia and the southwestern part of the state have experienced loss of income and cropland. In the search for alternative crops to replace the two former mainstays of Virginia agriculture, researchers at Virginia State University (VSU) have identified vegetable soybean (edamame) as a potentially profitable option for former tobacco farmers. Unlike commodity soybean, edamame is harvested green and marketed as a specialty vegetable. Similar to tobacco in that it lends itself to intensive cultivation in small holdings, edamame can, with proper marketing, emerge as a lucrative cash crop. For example, sales have averaged \$2 per pound of fresh in-the-pod edamame, and one grower was able to sell half-pound packs of shelled edamame for \$6.

What has the project done so far?

With support from the Virginia Tobacco Commission, VSU is working with Southside growers to commercialize three edamame varieties developed by the Soybean Breeding Program at the VSU Agriculture Research Station. So far, 25 growers have been contracted to grow and market edamame. The project has purchased harvesting and processing equipment and set up a centralized processing facility in Farmville, Va. VSU Cooperative Extension continues to provide marketing support.



VSU Research and Extension faculty and staff meeting with Mrs. Chandler (in pink) in her certified kitchen

Impact Statement

- Twenty-five former tobacco farmers have been trained to grow and market edamame.
- A consumer base for Southside-grown edamame has been established and continues to expand.
- Edamame is beginning to be recognized as a specialty crop in Virginia.

Strategic Priority: This research addresses the priority areas of Specialty Crops, Agribusiness Development, and Small and Disadvantaged Farmers.

What research is needed?

Edamame has a short harvest window and limited shelf life. So far, the biggest challenges to growers have been coordinating a timely harvest of all fields and processing/delivering the crop to market before spoilage occurs. To address these problems, VSU researchers are looking at combinations of planting dates and varieties that will widen the window for planting. Breeding of short-season varieties would greatly benefit this effort. There is also a need to diversify the market for edamame, which includes the use of edamame as raw material for value-added products, such as “ready-to-eat” snack packs, succotash or hummus. The market cannot absorb all the fresh harvest; consequently, preservation methods such as freezing or canning need to be investigated. If all goes as anticipated, edamame will become a new cash crop that will supplement farm income and help small farmers salvage their livelihoods and legacies.

Want to know more?

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Product Sample: Edamame and Corn Salad Medley

Ingredients: Edamame, corn, cider vinegar, bell peppers, sugar, olive oil, green onions, fresh parsley, fresh cilantro, lime juice, oregano, garlic powder and black pepper.

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