



Census of Agriculture Feature Stories

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American Ginseng – Rooted in Wisconsin

Since the early 1700's, American ginseng (*Panax Quinquefolium*) – harvested in Canada and the United States – was collected from the wild and exported to China. The first attempt to cultivate ginseng in the United States was made by Abraham Whisman of Boones Path, VA, in the 1870's. However, it wasn't until the late 1880's that ginseng was successfully cultivated¹.

The 1992 Census of Agriculture was the first census in which ginseng production was measured apart from other herbs because of its economic significance. Ginseng is a high value, cash root crop that requires 4 to 5 years of growth before it is ready for harvesting. After the ginseng roots are harvested, the growing beds are prepared and another 5 year growing cycle begins. Ginseng berries, from which ginseng seeds are extracted, are not harvested until the plant is in its third or subsequent year of growth. Ginseng seeds take an additional 18 to 24 months of preparation before they can be used.

The 1992 Census of Agriculture reported 824 farms with 1,505 acres producing 1,726,487 pounds of ginseng. Although ginseng is grown in other States (Kentucky, Minnesota, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), Wisconsin is the leading State for ginseng production with 785 farms. Wisconsin's farms accounted for 97 percent of all ginseng produced and about 95 percent of all acres harvested. This is largely due to its unique soil and growing conditions.

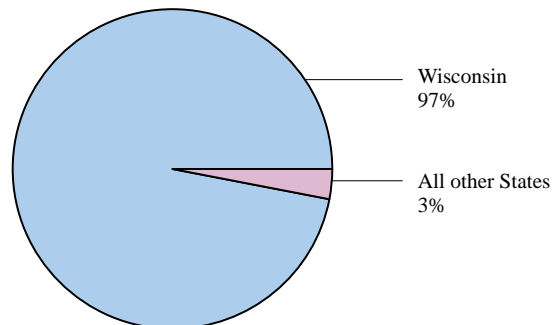
¹Foster Steven, *American Ginseng*, American Botanical Council, Botanical Series No. 308, p. 5, 1975.

Census data show that of the 785 ginseng farms in Wisconsin, 685 farms harvested 2 acres or less in 1992. These farms accounted for 995,842 pounds harvested, which represented about 60 percent of Wisconsin's ginseng production.

Marathon County, WI, is the heart of United States ginseng production. Based on 1992 Census of Agriculture data, Marathon County reported 649 ginseng farms with 1,234 acres harvested producing 1,460,750 pounds of ginseng. This represented

Cultivated Ginseng Production: 1992

U.S. Total: 1,726,487 pounds



U.S. Department of Commerce
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85 percent of United States ginseng production and 82 percent of the acreage.

Ginseng is an ancient commodity used not only in Asian cultures (e.g. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese), but also among the American Indians in the Seneca, Crow, Oklahoma Seminole, and Penobscot tribes². The first written account of ginseng use appeared about 4,700 years ago³ in the writings of Emperor Shen Nung, the father of agriculture and herbal therapy⁴ in China. The Chinese have collected ginseng root for centuries for herbal and medicinal purposes. Ginseng is claimed to have a general strengthening effect that raises physical and mental capacity.

The production and export of American ginseng from United States soil is not new. Farmers are now becoming more aware of its relatively high market value as an export commodity. A total of 1,885,764 pounds of ginseng was exported from the United States in 1992⁵. The free alongside ship (F.A.S.) export value was \$104,554,708. Cultivated ginseng comprised 1,664,704 pounds, which represented 88 percent of total exports. Some of the countries of destination were Canada, Mexico, Columbia, United Kingdom,

²Ibid. 1.

³"The Ginseng Seed," Newsletter of the American Ginseng Society, Vol. 9, Number 3.
Marshall Ken, 1994. *The Ginseng Trail* p. 8.

⁴Veringa Louise, 1978. *The Ginseng Book*, Ryka Publication, p. 7.

⁵1992 *Exports Report*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Foreign Trade Division.

Netherlands, France, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, and Peoples Republic of China.

Some of the other commodities reported in the 1992 Census of Agriculture are:

Crops:

Artichokes
Asparagus
Avocados
Canola
Dry lima beans
Eggplant
Endive
Figs
Garlic
Hops
Kiwi fruit
Lentils
Olives
Pistachio
Wild rice

Livestock:

Angora goats
Burros
Horses
Pheasants

Livestock Products:

Honey

Editor's Note: *Sampling is used to collect data for selected items and to account for nonresponding farm operations. Thus, the results are subject to sampling variability as well as reporting and coverage errors.*