Soybean [Glycine max (L.) Merr.] is the leading oilseed crop produced and consumed in the world today. A native of Asia, the soybean was introduced into North America, Europe, then into South and Central America (Hymowitz, 2004, this publication). In each of these production areas, soybean has become a major economic crop.

Current world production of soybean far exceeds that of any other edible oilseed (Plate 1–1). The 176 million megagrams (Mg) of soybean produced in 2001 is 35% of the world total oilseed production. Oil palm (Elaeis guineensis Jacq.) is second, with 26% of world oilseeds, and coconut (Cocos nucifera L.) comprises 10% of world production. Peanut (Arachis hypogaea L.), cottonseed (Gossypium hirsutum L.), and rapeseed (Brassica napus L.) each make up about 7% of world oilseeds. Sunflower (Helianthus annus L.) is about 4%, and olive (Olea europaea L.) about 3% of world oilseed production.

Soybean has been the dominant oilseed produced since the 1960s (Smith and Huyser, 1987). Since 1985, world soybean production has increased by 75 million Mg (Plate 1–1). During this time, oil palm production has increased 90 million Mg, rapeseed production 15 million Mg, peanut production 15 million Mg, coconut production 12 million Mg, and sunflower about 8 million Mg. Cottonseed and sesame (Sesamum indicum L.) seed production have remained relatively unchanged since 1985.

1–1 WORLD SOYBEAN PRODUCTION

About 50 countries in the world grow soybean (Table 1–1). During the past half century, the USA has been the world’s leading producer and, in 2000/2001, produced about 77 million Mg of soybean, or 45% of the world total (Plate 1–2). The two largest producers in South America are Brazil, with 35 million Mg (21% of world total) produced on 14 million ha, and Argentina with about 23 million Mg (14% of world total) produced on 9 million ha. The People’s Republic of China, with 15 million Mg, (9% of world total) and India, with 5 million Mg, are the two largest soybean producers in Asia and the Middle East. Italy, with 0.9 million Mg, was the largest soybean producer in the European Union. The Russian Federation, with 0.3, and Yugoslavia, with 0.2 million Mg, produced most of the soybean in Eastern Europe.