

Cultivation and Breeding of Buckwheat as a New Kind of Functional Food in Korea

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The first record of buckwheat in Korea was revealed from an old Korean book, "Hyangyakguguebbang(鄕藥救急方)" written in the era of king 'Gojong' who governed the country from AD 1236 to 1251 in the Korea dynasty.

Buckwheat in Korea has been known to be introduced from China in 5th - 6th century. One of the most famous buckwheat noodles, 'Naengmyeon' had been used popularly among the people in the Korea dynasty. It is true that buckwheat noodle had been cooked and sold in temples during the Korea dynasty, and was regarded it as one of the temple foods at that time.

Buckwheat has been cultivated as an alternative crop and buckwheat grains have been used as a hardy plant when the food situation for people was lacking in Korea. Buckwheat was an important crop in a slash-and-burn field(shifting cultivation) of the mountainous area in Kangwon province. A written history of the shifting cultivation in Korea was found in an old book "Taekriji" which was written by Lee, Jung-Hwan in the Chosun dynasty.

The area and number of households of shifting cultivation in Korea was 40,000 ha and 135,000 household, respectively in 1973. Fifty to sixty kilogram of buckwheat grains per 1a was harvested at an altitude of 600 - 800m. Folk songs which have been sung among the people in shifting areas include buckwheat meal. One of the folk songs for buckwheat is as follows; "they do not eat rice with or without waxy property but eat buckwheat mixture."

Since 1974, shifting cultivation has been legally prohibited to allow revegetation of destroyed mountains and rehabilitation of woodlands in Korea.

Buckwheat has been traditionally marketed as noodle or flour for the manufacture of noodles, and also as groats for food in Korea. Consumption in markets has increased over the past several years. Buckwheat grains are mainly consumed in the form of noodles in Korea. However, many people have recently pursued a desire to make food products of high quality in processing buckwheat materials for health reasons.