

# Edamame Soybeans From Vancouver To Kampala

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Dr. Al Probst, the USDA soybean breeder at Purdue University, introduced me to soybeans as a green vegetable when I was in graduate school. I steamed immature soybeans of common grain varieties for my children. They had a great time opening the salted pods and eating the beans with their fingers. We must not forget that in addition to being nutritious, immature soybeans taste good and are fun to eat.

In 1961, I helped organize FFR Cooperative, a forage breeding organization owned by nine large cooperatives. In a few years Canadian and Japanese cooperatives joined in the support of the breeding program. The emphasis changed from forage crops to corn and soybeans. We developed grain type soybean varieties that sold a quarter million bags of certified seed each year. After heading this program for 23 years, I resigned in 1984 and moved from Indiana to my ancestral home in Vancouver, Washington.

In 1985 the University of Wyoming offered me the director of research position on their USAID contract in Baidoa, Somalia. A few years later I accepted a professorship with Ohio State University to lead the national sunflower effort in Kampala, Uganda. In both Somalia and Uganda I obtained edamame soybeans from S. Shanmugasundaram, Director of Program I, AVRDC.

In Uganda the local people are quite receptive to new foods, but in Somalia and where I last worked in Zimbabwe a limited diet is acceptable. The staff at the Namalonge Research Station near Kampala were very fond of steamed immature soybeans that I prepared for seminars. They couldn't believe that there wasn't some secret spice or cooking technique used to convert the local grain type soybeans into such a tasty snack.

When I returned to Vancouver, Washington I started an edamame selection program. Again I called on AVRDC for germ plasm. I planted replicated plots and began eliminating lines that would not mature pods in the cool long days of Western Washington. In 1995 I produced 10 kg of the most promising line in both Vancouver and Moses Lake, Washington. The climate at Moses Lake is radically different from Vancouver in that the daytime temperatures are high and sunlight is near 100%. The following year I attempted to grow seed in North Dakota, but the crop was lost when the grower delayed harvest allowing the seed to shatter. I also grew the variety in Belize in the winter where it appears to be somewhat daylight insensitive.

The Nichols Garden Nursery in Albany, Oregon inquired about testing my selection. They entered it in several locations in Western Oregon where it performed well. They proposed that my selection be sold as Buker's Favorite which is now the variety name.

The Purdue University Edamame Soybean Trials included a taste preference test. My variety ranked well with some panelists. When harvested as dry grain, shattering was a problem in Indiana. Buker's Favorite is being used as a parent in Purdue's crossing program.

In 1998 I had two short term assignments in Turkmenistan. Buker's Favorite was among the varieties planted in this cotton growing economy. Reports received this spring indicate that my variety has been well received and production has expanded.

I returned to Uganda in December of 1998 and again in December 2000. On both assignments I gave my hosts samples of my soybean variety and prepared local grain types as a green vegetable snack. In Kampala, I persuaded the hotel chef to steam some green grain soybean pods for me and invited a reporter from the major newspaper to join me for a snack. He prepared a nice article for his paper on the benefits of eating soybeans as a green vegetable. He noted that selling corn as a green vegetable generally makes a farmer more money than selling dry grain. He concluded that the same relationship exists in soybeans.

In summary green vegetable soybeans can improve the human diet here and in the developing world. We must remember that in the developing world it is the small children that need a higher protein diet. Edamame soybeans satisfy this dietary requirement and taste good as well as being fun to eat.