

# U.S. Corn's Integral Role in Mexico's Trade and Culinary Culture

Did you know that Mexico is the top trading partner for the United States? In marketing year 2023-2024, trade with Mexico totaled \$799 billion. From cultural, culinary and industrial considerations, here's a snapshot of many important things U.S. corn provides to Mexico.



## Mexico's Trade & Economic Impact

- **Top Importer Status:** Mexico ranks as one of the largest importers of U.S. corn, primarily yellow corn for animal feed. In Marketing Year (MY) 2023/24, **Mexico imported a record-breaking 23.4 million metric tons (MMT) or 921 million bushels of U.S. corn**, surpassing its previous record by 7.3 MMT (287 million bushels). Mexico accounts for nearly 40% of total U.S. shipments annually.
- **Value of Corn Exports:** Exports to Mexico represent more than **\$5 billion in trade**, supporting Mexico's livestock sector—a backbone of their food supply chain.



## Cultural & Culinary Intersections

- **Feed to Feast:** U.S. corn feeds Mexican livestock that ends up in dishes like carnitas and barbacoa. U.S. white corn exports to Mexico supplement their tortilla and tortilla flour industry.
- **Corn's Dual Role:** While Mexico champions its native white corn for tortillas (over 60 varieties exist!), U.S. yellow corn plays a supporting role for feed and industrial use. This creates a tale of two corns—tradition vs. scale—that shapes the complementary relationships in North American agriculture.
- **Corn in Dozens of Dishes and Favorite Snacks:** While Mexican corn is used in Mexican cuisine, foods like tacos, flautas, enchiladas, tamales, tlacoyos, pozole, esquites, gorditas, huchepos, elotes, corundas, sopes, pan de elote, memelas, tostadas and chilaquiles use U.S. corn for snack foods.
- **Beverage Traditions:** While many commercial Mexican beers primarily use barley and malt, 663,000 tons of corn are used for make these brews each year. Corn is also a staple for many traditional drinks like Atole and tesgüino, a fermented beverage made by indigenous groups. U.S.-based corn and corn sweeteners also contribute to Mexico's aguas frescas, jarritos and colas!

## Industrial Applications

- **Wet Milling:** Wet milling of corn for sweeteners and starches happens on both sides of the border. In Mexico, 3-4 MMT (118-157 million bushels) of yellow corn support this industry for processing in Mexico.



**U.S. GRAINS**  
COUNCIL  
grains.org

# Harvesting Potential: The Journey of Corn from Field to Fajita

The journey of a kernel of U.S. corn travels from an Illinois farm to a Mexican feedlot, then to a street vendor's grill as part of a sizzling taco de carne asada—connecting farmers, ranchers and chefs across borders!



## 1. The U.S. Grows Corn

The U.S. is the largest corn exporter in the world, and Mexico is the largest importer of U.S. corn. In the marketing year 2023/24, the U.S. exported 42.1 MMT (1.7 billion bushels). Exports to Mexico in MY 23/24 totaled 23.4 MMT (921 million bushels).



## 2. U.S. Corn Goes to Mexico

Imported corn enters Mexico primarily by rail and sea vessels. About 60% arrives by rail, mainly via shuttle trains, and 40% by sea vessel. Approximately 300,000 MT consist of white corn, headed directly for the Mexican food supply, while the rest is yellow corn used as feed in the livestock sector.



## 3. Livestock Consume Yellow Corn to Produce Meat

Most corn produced in Mexico is white corn. Mexico only produces around 3 MMT (118 million bushels) of yellow corn each year for the livestock feeding industry.

Mexico's livestock industry demands more corn for feed, while drought conditions in certain regions have limited production. The USDA currently projects Mexico's 24/25 corn imports to be an estimated 25.2 MMT (992 million bushels).



## 5. White Corn Becomes Tortillas

The average Mexican eats about 170 pounds of tortillas each year. Tortillas are used in all traditional dishes and accompany nearly all meals.



## 4. Cooking Mexican Meals

Corn is deeply woven into Mexican culture. Mexican white corn, supplemented by U.S. exports, serves as a main staple of the Mexican diet and is a vital source of carbohydrates, fiber and nutrients.

U.S. yellow corn fuels Mexico's culinary culture by feeding livestock that end up in dishes like carnitas and barbacoa.



**U.S. GRAINS**  
COUNCIL  
grains.org