

In a World Without Corn...

Corn and products made from corn improve the lives of Americans in thousands of little ways. Often, consumers don't even know corn is present, let alone know the role it plays. But if corn and its products weren't available, many common products would be less useful, more expensive, even unavailable. Here are some examples of the little annoyances and bigger problems Americans would face without corn:

No frozen pizza! Freezing pizza is a problem, because the moisture in the sauce can migrate into the crust, making it so soggy it's unappealing to eat. Modified corn starch is used to provide a barrier that prevents water migration and keeps the crust crisp.

On a low-fat diet? Say thank you for corn. Many low-fat foods depend on corn-derived food starches to provide qualities that used to come from fats. Examples include everything from low-fat salad dressing to baked goods and meat products.

Frustrating wallpaper. If you've installed wallpaper, you know how important it is to have time to adjust each strip accurately. Repositioning is possible because the wallpaper paste is made with corn starch modified to slow down its adhesive action.

Daily bread buying. Corn syrup prevents waste and saves consumers money by keeping bread fresh longer. By retaining moisture, corn syrup keeps baked goods from drying out too quickly and going stale.

Brown lettuce leaves. Many fruits and vegetables start to turn an unattractive brown once they're cut and exposed to air. Citric acid, recognized as a safe food ingredient, can prevent browning...and much of the U.S. supply of citric acid is made from corn sweeteners.

No coloring for kids. Whether playing with chalk on the sidewalk or crayons in school, American children rely on corn. Corn starch is used as a binder to help such products hold together better when in use. It may also be used to dust molds during the manufacturing process so that brand-new crayons pop out undamaged.

Americans are sleeping with corn. A whole new family of corn products, marketed under the Ingeo trademark, includes pillows and comforters stuffed with 100% corn fill and blankets woven from the Ingeo fiber. Ingeo products are environmentally friendly because they take less energy to produce than many synthetics and they can be composted back into natural components.

Drippy lollipops. Candy makers began using corn syrups in lollipops and other hard candies generations ago because the syrups hold moisture and prevent drips.

Putting the "crunch" in snack foods. When Americans snack, corn products are more popular than potato chips. In addition to corn and tortilla chips (20% of the snack foods we eat), other snacks such as cheese puffs rely on corn ingredients to provide their crunch.

Packing, storing and moving with corn. Corn starch provides the adhesive to glue down every little ridge in corrugated cardboard. Whether you're taking delivery on a new appliance, boxing old clothes for the church bazaar, or moving across country, you're using corn.

Crystals in ice cream. As a box of ice cream goes in and out of freezers on the way home from the store and in the kitchen, it's natural for crystals to develop in it. Part of the role corn sweeteners play in ice cream and other frozen desserts is to keep crystals from developing.

Ack, hack, cough, gag. Corn contributes in many ways to reducing pollution. Ethanol, used to reduce air pollution, is probably the best-known example. Others include the use of corn starch in industrial filters to reduce water pollution, and corn-based plastics like PLA (polylactic acid), which composts back into natural components after use.

Want S'more? Not without corn! Marshmallows stay fresh longer because corn syrup keeps them from drying out too quickly. Corn ingredients are also used to make graham crackers, which means you can't enjoy S'mores without corn!

What, no plaster board? As viewers of This Old House learned in one episode, corn starch, which helps bind the gypsum filling together, is an essential ingredient in manufacturing gypsum or plaster board for building walls.