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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Oilseed crops and human civilization have coevolved in a symbiotic way since ancient times. Soybean, a staple food in China, was domesticated there more than 3,500 years ago (Chapter 2). Sesame seed was also known in ancient times, and rapeseed was mentioned in the Indian Sanskrit writings from 2000 B.C. (Bajaj, 1989). Charred sesame seeds, about 5000 years old, were found in archaeological excavations in Harappi (Pakistan). Sesame was also known in antiquity in Anzolia (Turkey) and Mesopotamia (now Iraq). Its oil was used in food preparation, lighting, and personal grooming. Sesame is not mentioned in the Bible, but it was well known to the Hellenic and Roman eras in the Middle East (Chapter 8). The domesticated groundnut has been cultivated and utilized in South America for over 3500 years. The earliest archaeological evidence of groundnut in Peru has date back to 1500 B.C. (Chapter 3).