Timeline

Before 1631
Native Americans planted corn, beans and squash

1631
The first Dutch settlers arrive.

Did You Know?
Farming was critical to the survival of Delaware's early European settlers, who cultivated crops such as wheat, barley, Indian corn, and peas, while raising livestock such as pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle for meat and milk.

1638
The first Swedish settlers arrive.

Did You Know?
Under Dutch rule until 1663, Delaware had 110 plantations which tended 2,000 cows and oxen, thousands of pigs, and horses and sheep.

Did You Know?
Swedish settlers who arrived in 1638 depended on agriculture for sustenance.

1664
The first English settlers arrive.

Did You Know?
The advent of English control in 1664 under William Penn's Pennsylvania colony produced the political and economic stability that enabled Delaware agriculture to prosper.

1704
The "Three Lower Counties" of Pennsylvania were granted their own legislative assembly.

Did You Know?
With Philadelphia as its major trade center, Delaware produced profitable exports such as tobacco, which was commonly used in the 1700s to settle debts and obligations.

Did You Know?
Soft red wheat became the state's first important cash crop thanks to innovative flour mills designed by Newport's Oliver Evans, bringing fame and prosperity to the new state of Delaware. Born in Newport in 1755, Evans would revolutionize the flour milling industry. The process of milling had not changed for centuries until Evans made major improvements in a mill on Red Clay Creek in northern Delaware.

1750s
During this time period, several Quaker families (the Talnalls, Cantys, Shipleys, Leas, Mortons, and Poules) had founded Delaware's grain milling industry on the Brandywine River, creating demand for grain shipped by farms up the Delaware River or hauled overland by Conestoga wagon.

1770
As tobacco declined in significance by 1770, other grain crops such as wheat, corn, barley, oats, and rye gained in importance as Delaware's agricultural trade steadily expanded through the latter part of the century.

Did You Know?
Beef cattle in the 1700s were raised in marshes and woods, taking four years to reach the age for slaughter as opposed to ten months today.

1790
1790, Oliver Evans was granted one of the very first United States patents, signed by President George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Did You Know?
After immigrating from France, E.I. duPont found a gunpowder mill on the banks of the Brandywine River in 1802. Listing his occupation as "Botanist" on his passport, duPont and his heirs had a major influence on the growth and development of agriculture in Delaware. Eleutherian Mills, duPont's home and farmstead, was a successful farm enterprise. His son, Henry DuPont, became the largest landowner in the state while developing a keen interest in agricultural improvement. The modern DuPont Company began developing agricultural chemicals in the 1940s and remains a world leader in agricultural technology today.

1815
Steamboats were common on the Delaware River.

1829
The Chesapeake and Delaware canal opened, linking the region's two major bodies of water.

1832
Isaac Reeves had planted the first orchard of "budded" fruit trees in Delaware – a technique of propagation by grafting that ensured that a whole planting produced the same variety.

1832
Delaware Railroad launched linking Wilmington with Delmar.

Did You Know?
Railroads transformed Delaware's rural heritage and contributed to the economic growth of the communities they served.

1840s
Major Phillip Reybold from Delaware City become the "peach king," shipping peaches by sail and steamboat.

Did You Know?
The Richardson and Robbins Company, established in 1855, was the first cannery on the Delmarva Peninsula. The company, located on Kings Highway in Dover, canned fruits and vegetables, deviled ham, and its specialty, plum pudding.

1890s
More than 4 million peach trees covered the state.

Did You Know?
In the 1890s, a mysterious disease called "peach yellows" affected the crop, causing a plunge to 2.4 million trees by 1900 and just over 300,000 by 1920. Fruit production gradually shifted to strawberries and apples.

1895
The Delaware General Assembly made the peach blossom the official state flower.

1914
Henry Francis duPont sold the mixed breed of Guernsey and Holstein cattle and develops a better, more productive breed.

1920
The Supplee Wills-Jones milk station at Nassau was built as a rail shipping point for the Lewes-Rehoboth area.

1920
The first fair opened on July 27 in Harrington. Admission was 25 cents for children and 50 cents for adults.

Did You Know?
To supplement their seasonal income, many farmers began collecting holly from nearby woods to make Christmas wreaths and other decorations. This led to a boom in the 1920s and 1930s that saw Delaware become the center of a thriving industry that lasted until plastic imported wreaths flooded the market. Holly's commercial importance spurred the General Assembly to name it the state tree in 1939.

1923
Cecile Steele experimented with using larger houses to raise their birds, inspiring the modern broiler industry.

1941
The University of Delaware purchased the Tyndall farm west of Georgetown developing an agricultural extension and research station.

Did You Know?
Elbert "Bert" Carvel married Ann Valiant, whose family owned a fertilizer company that served the Delmarva Peninsula. Carvel ran the company and was elected lieutenant governor in 1944 and eventually elected governor in 1948 and again in 1960. Gov. Carvel served on the University of Delaware's board of trustees from 1945 to 1985.

2018
About 90 percent of farms are either sole or family proprietorships or family-owned corporations. Just under 40 percent of the state's land is devoted to agricultural production, making it the predominant land use.

2018
Delaware State Fair now covers more than 300 acres and attracts more than 300,000 visitors a year. The fair is where children exhibit 4-H projects, compete in livestock contests, and make lifelong friends with others from around the state.

Did You Know?
The Cooperative Extension movement has its roots at land-grant universities such as the Tuskegee Institute, teaching farming and running an experimental station.