

Dry Beans are Healthy for Our Diets and Our Economy

Dry beans are especially important to people in Ontario County because they contribute to the overall well-being of our local economy. Light and dark red kidney beans and black beans are grown on nearly 5,000 acres in the county at a value of approximately \$1.4 million. The majority of the beans grown locally go to canners, but a significant number are dry packaged. Duane Thompson of CR Zornow in Seneca Castle, Steve Blowers in Hall and Earl and Warren Blowers in Geneva are the main buyers and handlers who ship to canners and packagers in the Eastern United States.

Dry beans have important health benefits for everyone. Although beans have been a nutrient rich food source for centuries, they have gained a renewed status as a relatively inexpensive, versatile and healthy source of protein for the world's growing population. Praise has been heaped on dry beans by the press recently after decades of research have revealed that dry beans offer numerous benefits such as reducing risks of cardiovascular disease, certain cancers and diabetes. Beans contribute valuable nutrients like folic acid, magnesium and fiber to our diets. They are low in fat and cholesterol. For those on a budget, dry beans are one of the inexpensive and yet nutritionally complete foods.

In technical terms, dried beans, also called pulses, are the edible seeds that grow in pods on annual plants, bushes or vines. In the United States, like many developed countries, we consider them as vegetables or legumes. Because beans can be easily stored and shipped, they are often dried to extend their keeping qualities. There are thousands of varieties known by many different names.

For centuries, dried beans have acted as a primary protein source for much of the world's population. It is only in relatively recent history that developed nations have supplanted beans with other types of protein, notably animal protein. In the past decade with renewed interest in ethnic cuisines and greater knowledge of the health benefits of beans, people are increasingly adding these legumes to their regular diets.

A half-cup of cooked dried beans carries about 120 calories along with valuable complex carbohydrates, but with a low-glycemic index. In other words, the carbohydrates in beans do not cause as quick or as steep a rise in blood sugar as do many other carbohydrate-rich foods. Beans are also a good source of B vitamins including folic acid. Beans also provide the minerals iron, potassium, selenium, magnesium and even some calcium but no cholesterol. They promote digestive health and can help reduce fat levels in the blood.

It is little wonder that the newly released US. Food Pyramid rates dried beans so highly. Meat, eggs, poultry and dry beans are listed near the top of the pyramid, with two to three servings per day recommended. A half-cup of dried beans equals one ounce of lean meat as a protein serving. Yet, for those who are concerned about cholesterol, dried beans have only a trace of fat and no cholesterol. The new guidelines also call for increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables. The USDA calls for Americans to consume at least three cups of beans each week, representing a six fold increase from the half cup of bean

that Americans are currently eating each week. For more information on the new dietary guidelines, go to www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.

Try adding some dried beans to your diet. For recipes, browse through the index in your cookbooks under black beans and kidney beans, visit Internet sites, including www.wegmans.com and www.americanbean.org and learn how to incorporate the healthful benefits of beans into your meals!

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