Fact Sheet

MyPyramid.gov
STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU

Serve More Dry Beans and Peas *for Healthier School Meals*

KEY ISSUES:

- Dietary fiber from dry beans and peas (legumes) as part of a healthy diet helps to lower the risk of heart disease.
- Dry beans and peas:
  - are excellent sources of plant protein.
  - provide other nutrients such as iron, potassium, folate, and zinc.
  - are naturally low in fat and sodium.
  - have no saturated fat or cholesterol.
- The *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend eating three cups of beans a week, based on a 2,000-calorie meal plan.
- Serve beans or other legumes at least once per week to help students get these important nutrients!

We know beans are good for us, but many people don't realize how delicious they taste! Beans are an inexpensive food that can boost the nutritional content of school meals. Beans are versatile, too. Whether served as a vegetarian option, or served with meats, poultry, fish and cheese, beans complement the meal. Find creative ways to add more beans to school menus! For example, try savory pinto beans and salsa in a chef salad, or add red beans to rice pilaf!

Dry beans and peas are mature forms of legumes, or plants which have pods with rows of seeds inside. Some popular varieties include pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, lentils, split peas, and garbanzo beans (chickpeas). Only a few types, such as green beans, string beans, baby green lima beans, and fresh soybeans (edamame) are not considered dry beans.

Easy ways to follow the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*

Recipe for Success

- **Choose the easiest form!** Use canned, pre-cooked beans to simplify recipes (no soaking needed) and reduce cooking times.
- **Power up recipes** with more beans! Add dry-packaged or canned beans and peas when preparing casseroles, stews, and side dishes. Make chili more interesting by combining kidney and pinto beans.
- **Serve satisfying soups**. Attract students and teachers with low-sodium split pea, lentil, minestrone, or white bean soups. Use pureed beans to thicken soups and sauces.
- **Spice up your menus** with Southwest flair! Offer black bean enchiladas, low-fat refried beans, or tacos with whole pinto beans.

USDA Commodity Food Program

Order dry beans and peas uncooked in sealed bags or pre-cooked in cans through the USDA Commodity Food Program. USDA will offer low-sodium (140 mg/serving) canned dry beans and peas in School Year 2009. Check the list of available foods at: www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/schcnp/.

- **Have a bean taste-test!** Let students sample dishes that use dry beans and peas as a main ingredient. Some ideas include: Veggie Burgers, Taco Pizza with refried beans, Cowboy Beans, Hummus, or Lentil Pilaf.
- **Spruce up the salad bar!** Offer canned garbanzo beans, red kidney beans, black beans, or a mixture of all three!
- **Use colorful garnishes** like diced fresh green pepper or red pepper rings to add eye appeal and showcase your favorite bean dishes.
- **Bring back a classic!** Pair baked beans as a side dish with oven-baked chicken to bring back memories of a summer cookout!

Messages for Students

- Be a Bean Counter. Try ½ cup of beans in your favorite soups and side dishes. Beans are naturally low in fat and provide some of the iron and potassium your body needs.
- Make your meal or snack pop with flavor!
  - Wrap black beans in a tortilla with low-fat cheese and salsa for a satisfying meal!
  - Try a great-tasting hummus dip (made from pureed garbanzo beans) with vegetables or whole-wheat pita bread for a delicious snack.

Did You Know?

- MyPyramid includes dry beans and peas in both the Vegetable Group and the Meat and Beans Group. Beans and other legumes count as either a vegetable or as a meat alternate, but not as both in the same meal.
- Rinsing and draining pre-cooked canned beans reduces the sodium content. Or, soak and cook bagged dry beans without adding any salt.
- Dry beans and peas provide an excellent source of plant protein and fiber, magnesium, folate, iron, and zinc. Americans often do not get enough of these nutrients.

For more information:

www.MyPyramid.gov

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