

## Are Beans Working In Your School Kitchen?

*Editor's Note: USDA will soon provide nearly 294,000 bags of pinto and great northern beans for use in the National School Lunch Program and other federal food and nutrition assistance programs. We dedicate this issue to the exploration of how schools are using dry beans in their menus every day.*

By Coleen Donnelly

It seemed strange to see the Humane Society at a National School Nutrition Conference. Generally, these conferences are held to bring K–12 foodservice employees together to attend education sessions pertaining to school nutrition, and to sample food items and source wares at the large vendor show. The Humane Society seemed out of place. I visited their booth and learned that they were there to promote “Meatless Mondays” to schools across the country in an effort to reduce the amount of animal protein consumed in this country.



Politics and personal beliefs aside, the campaign brings to light a very real problem schools face when planning meals. Districts are extremely challenged, financially and otherwise, when it comes to providing nutritious meals that meet the increasingly-demanding USDA guidelines. Protein is a required component of school food, and meat doesn't always make sense because it is an expensive option. Substituting other cred-

ible proteins—like dry beans—keeps a school lunch program in compliance with the protein requirement and is a great way to save money, not to mention how it benefits the children.

***RDN Takeaway #1:***  
Substituting credible proteins—like dry beans—keeps a school lunch program in compliance.

Beans can play an important role in K–12 menus, whether it be in salad bars and casseroles, in kids' favorites like quesadillas and mac 'n cheese, or in desserts. Under the USDA guidelines for the National School Lunch Program, beans hold the distinction of counting as either a protein or a vegetable, so the menu planner can choose how to credit them based on the other elements of the meal. This flexibility can help solve what many menu planners refer to as the “puzzle” of school food service menu writing.

### Helping Children Like Beans

In my work with kids, I find that it is much easier to gain acceptance with a new food if there are a couple of things in place. Simply placing an item on a kid's plate and explaining that it must be served because of some USDA rule condemns it straight to the garbage can. But a proper introduction, some education about the food itself, solid recipe concepts, and the involvement of kids in the selection process all help to shine a favorable light on the required

## Adding beans to your diet

By Kristin Kesterson

**Tip #1:** Add beans to your morning smoothie. See recipes at [BeanInstitute.com](http://BeanInstitute.com)

**Tip #2:** Use hummus in place of mayo in wraps or sandwiches.

**Tip #3:** Add kidney beans to sloppy joes or casseroles.

**Tip #4:** Keep rinsed canned beans in the fridge (up to four days) to add to salads.

**Tip #5:** Add rinsed canned black beans and corn to your favorite salsa.

**Tip #6:** Use beans in place of pasta or potatoes in soups and stews.

**Tip #7:** Try breakfast tacos: beans, eggs, and salsa in a corn tortilla.

**Tip #8:** Make a chocolatey treat. Combine a can of pureed black beans and a brownie mix. Bake according to package directions.

**Tip #9:** Spread refried beans on a tostada shell for an anytime snack.

**Tip #10:** Snack on roasted chickpeas (also called garbanzo beans). Drain and rinse a 15-ounce can of chickpeas; dry thoroughly. Spread on baking pan and roast at 400°F. for 15 minutes. Combine 2 Tbsp. sugar and 1 tsp. cinnamon. Sprinkle chickpeas with 1 Tbsp. olive oil and the sugar-cinnamon mixture. Return to oven for 15 more minutes, turn oven off, prop the door open, and allow chickpeas to cool in oven.

### About the Author

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food. It is no secret that kids can be stubborn when it comes to trying new foods, but a successful transition doesn't have to be difficult. Here are a few ways to ease into serving affordable dishes containing beans that won't be met with a child's suspicion:

### Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Draw on well-known regional dishes that contain beans. Chili con carne, burritos, black bean soup, baked beans, red beans and rice, beans and franks, and refried beans are all great examples of bean dishes commonly served in restaurants and at home. Children probably have eaten these foods and enjoyed them. Stick with the type of bean that is popular with the demographic and your region. As long as the dishes are properly prepared, they will need no introduction.

### From Seed to Fork

Have a school garden program? There are countless examples of kids eating foods they've never tried before when they have grown the food themselves, and building a positive relationship with a food guarantees lifelong acceptance. In a garden classroom, kids plant the bean seeds, care for the plant, harvest the beans, then cook them in a delicious recipe. By the time the kids have gone through this process, they can't wait to try what they have created. And when beans show up on the lunch line, they're a welcome friend.

### RDN Takeaway #2:

**There are many ways to serve affordable bean dishes to children.**

### Beans? What Beans?

While it may not be fair to resort to trickery or "stealth health" when it comes to getting kids to eat what you want them to eat, there is nothing wrong with enhancing a dish with a healthful ingredient. Particularly when students have some formal nutrition education and can appreciate the benefits of certain foods, there is no reason to "hide" the good stuff. Mac 'n cheese is a great example. Some white beans pureed into the cheese sauce add a healthful dose of protein

and fiber and do nothing to diminish the flavor and texture of the dish. Or try replacing some of the saturated fat in muffins, cookies and brownies with pureed white beans for a healthful breakfast or an occasional treat.

### Put Beans In a Familiar Setting

There are some foods kids will always want to eat. Quesadillas are standard school lunch fare. Substituting black beans for some of the cheese in a quesadilla does two things: it encourages kids to eat beans in a food that already enjoys widespread appeal, and it allows the menu planner to meet the protein requirement without going over the saturated fat and sodium limits.

### Make It Fun, Give It a Gimmick

Shaker Salads layer whole grains, proteins, and vegetables in a clear cup. The dressing is held in a separate cup, on top of the ingredients under a domed lid. When it is time to eat, the dressing is added, the domed lid is snapped back into place and the salad is shaken and eaten right out of the cup. Not only do the salads offer the components required by the USDA, but they're also eye-catching and fun. Any type of bean can and should be used in these salads to meet the protein requirement. Introduce the salads in a fun environment that gets kids involved, possibly building their own, or even just shaking them up. Get the kitchen staff involved, too, to help supervise and share the enthusiasm.

### Organize a Sampling

Nothing empowers a child more than having a say in something. Sample some bean dishes and take a vote. A simple "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" is all it takes to determine whether a dish will be successful on a menu. 🌿

### About the Author

**Coleen Donnelly** has been involved in school lunch reform for 15 years. After a successful restaurant career, she started feeding school children and never looked back. Currently, she is the K-12 corporate chef for InHarvest, a company that specializes in premium rice, grains, and legumes.

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# School Children Eat Beans

These and more recipes available at [BeanInstitute.com](http://BeanInstitute.com)

By Chef Ann Cooper

Boulder Valley School District puts a high priority on providing healthy food for all of our students, faculty, and staff. We serve approximately 13,000 scratch-cooked meals a day and during lunch at least one of the entrees is vegetarian. In order to comply with the protein requirement of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, we rely on dry beans as one of our vegetarian proteins.

There are so many great things about beans—how many varieties there are, how many flavors there are, and how many textures. As a chef, it gives me an amazing palette from which to choose; in fact there are dozens and dozens of types of beans in a rainbow of colors, a plethora of flavors, and with creamy luscious textures.

Our school district menus include a wide variety of recipe choices that include beans. The recipes are served at all grade levels, Pre-K thru 12, and often at our Food Truck as well. A sampling of these choices include bean salads, bean nachos, bean burritos, black bean burgers, vegetarian chili, refried beans with tamales, and BBQ baked beans with hotdogs. From a versatility, nutrition, and deliciousness standpoint, we love to serve beans and hope that you try, and share, the following recipes. 🌱

## Spinach and Black Bean Burritos with Salsa

### Ingredients:

#### Burrito

- 1½ cups black beans, dry (about 3 c. cooked), drained
- 2½ t. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ¼ cup onion, diced
- 1 t. ground cumin
- 2½ t. fresh oregano, chopped
- 3 T. water
- 8 c. spinach, steamed and chopped
- 8 six-inch flour tortillas
- 2 c. traditional Mexican cheese, grated

#### Salsa

- 2 c. canned plum tomatoes, diced
- 2 T. fresh jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
- 2 T. fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ c. onion, diced
- 4½ t. lime juice
- ¾ t. salt



### PREPARATION

1. In a large pot, cook the black beans 4–6 hours or until tender. For a quicker cooking time, soak the beans in water overnight, drain, add fresh water and simmer for 3–4 hours.
2. In a medium-sized mixing bowl combine all salsa ingredients, mix thoroughly, and set aside.
3. Heat oil over medium heat. Add garlic and onions and sauté for 2 minutes.
4. Add cumin, oregano, and salt and cook for 1 minute.
5. Add beans and water and cook for approximately 8 minutes. Remove from the heat and keep warm.
6. Evenly distribute the spinach, beans, cheese, and salsa among the eight tortillas. Roll up as desired and serve.

**YIELD:** 8 servings | **SERVING SIZE:** 1 burrito

#### NUTRIENT INFORMATION PER SERVING:

Calories: 320; Total Fat: 11g; Saturated Fat: 4.5g; Cholesterol: 20mg; Sodium: <825mg; Carbohydrate: 41g; Dietary Fiber: 7g; Protein: 14g; Calcium: 285mg; Iron: 3.9mg; Potassium: 870mg

## Kale and White Bean Soup

### Ingredients:

- 1½ c. onion, diced
- 1½ T. extra virgin olive oil
- ½ t. garlic, minced
- ½ lb. cannellini, great northern, or navy beans (dry weight), cooked (roughly 2½ c. cooked), drained
- 4 c. vegetable stock (plus a bit more to adjust liquid to personal taste)
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ t. fresh rosemary, roughly chopped
- 1 t. low sodium salt

- ½ t. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 c. carrots, medium dice
- 7 c. kale, chopped
- ¾ c. parmesan cheese, grated



### PREPARATION

1. Sauté onions in oil for 5 minutes or until soft. Add garlic and cook for an additional minute.
2. Add cooked beans, stock, salt, pepper, bay leaf, and rosemary and simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Add carrots and cook another 5 minutes.
4. Add kale and cook about 12 minutes or until kale is tender. Add more vegetable stock if your soup needs more liquid, and warm through.
5. Check seasoning, adjust as needed, and serve sprinkled with grated parmesan cheese.

**YIELD:** 8 servings | **SERVING SIZE:** About 1 cup

#### NUTRIENT INFORMATION PER SERVING:

Calories: 200; Total Fat: 6g; Saturated Fat: 2g; Cholesterol: 10mg; Sodium: <700mg; Carbohydrate: 29g; Dietary Fiber: 8g; Protein: 12g; Calcium: 215mg; Iron: 2.74mg; Potassium: 790mg

### About the Author

Chef Ann Cooper is an author, chef, educator, and advocate for better food for all children. She is a graduate of The Culinary Institute of America and is currently director of food services for the Boulder Valley School District in Colorado.



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## Makin' It Happen In Your Kitchen

By Coleen Donnelly

While cooking dry beans (as opposed to using canned beans) might present a problem for some districts, the benefits can far outweigh any initial difficulties. Dry beans are considerably cheaper than canned and don't contain the sodium that canned beans do. The USDA is cracking down on sodium content in school lunches and phasing in strict limits in the coming years, so being able to control the amount of sodium going into an ingredient is very important.

At Weld County School District in Greeley, Colorado, the staff has been cooking their dry beans for years. While there are a few steps involved that require planning, it has become routine. Thousands of pounds of pinto beans are purchased annually from nearby Leffler Farms. They are sorted for rocks and foreign matter, cooked in large commercial tilt skillets and steam kettles, cooled properly on sheet pans, and refrigerated for use in various recipes. Equipment and space were key logistical elements in place before the move was made from canned beans, and all agree it's been a positive one.

### Is This Difficult?

Who sorts through all those beans by hand? This is where a clever school district can make their priorities work for them in the face of tough challenges. In an effort to find a sustainable option for their bean sorting needs, the district turned to district-wide employees who were on workers' comp and scheduled for light duty only. The employees put in full days sorting beans and contributing to their back-to-work requirements, while helping provide children healthy food. Rumor has it that after a good amount of bean sorting shifts, those workers are ready to return to work sooner than later.

It takes commitment on the part of a school district to feed their kids healthy food in light of the equipment and labor needs, lack of funding, and intricacies of menu planning under the USDA guidelines. But when the stage is set, cooking beans from scratch can be a fundamental part of changing school menus. For the good of all, put those beans to work! 🌱



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