



A Healthy Option

These days restaurateurs must be prepared to respond to their clients' growing concern about health and diet. In terms of both their nutritional qualities and their culinary potential, legumes are one of the healthiest and wisest choices as dietary constituents. They are, first and foremost, an excellent source of vegetable protein - on average 23%. They are also rich in fibre, a component that is, unfortunately, dangerously lacking in the diets of our clients in the developed countries.

It is worth letting our diners know that legumes are low in calories when they play a complementary role within a meal, and that they contain neither cholesterol nor fats that are harmful to the heart. In addition to being an excellent source of iron and minerals, recent studies have shown that they can help prevent various chronic diseases.

Apart from the valuable contribution they can make to maintaining a healthy diet, legumes are a "good deal" for the planet: they enrich the soils where they are grown with nitrogen, and have a low ecological impact. Every chef knows how convenient they are as a culinary element, and how easy they are to keep and to cook (not to mention their low cost). In short, legumes are ideal for diners who are increasingly concerned about the health of the planet and about their own well-being.

Calorie content

It is important to communicate to consumers that the basic calorie content of legumes - 300 kcal/ 100 g of product - varies a great deal depending on the other ingredients contained in a dish. Diners will find them lighter if we take advantage of their good taste and versatility by presenting them as a complement or accompaniment in various dishes. Their subtle flavour means that they can be a delicious element in salads, rice dishes or any culinary combination. Legumes are an important part of the "Mediterranean diet", which has lately gained such widespread recognition.

Responsible consumption

The energy cost involved in producing 1000 kcal in the form of legumes is far less than that involved in producing the same quantity of food energy in the form of meat. In other words, to produce 1 kg of meat, several kilos of legumes and cereals would be required as animal feed. So, the resulting meat product is more expensive both economically and from the perspective of energy consumed. All this when legumes themselves have nutritional qualities that are very similar to the meat they are used to produce. By consuming legumes, we are making a contribution to lessening the hunger of the planet. The responsible consumer will appreciate being provided with this information.

Legumes are rich in fibre,

both the soluble and the insoluble type. These two kinds of fibre perform a number of important functions in our bodies, such as:

- detoxifying of the body
- normalising bowel function
- helping to prevent colon cancer
- reducing blood levels of cholesterol
- regulating digestion
- lowering the level of the glucose peak produced by the foods eaten with the legumes, thereby reducing the risk of developing diabetes.

Vitamins and minerals

Legumes contain three times as much iron as meat. To aid in the assimilation of this mineral, it is recommendable to complement the ingestion of legumes with citrus fruit juice or with some other food rich in vitamin C.

A kilo of legumes contains twice as much phosphorous as a kilo of eggs and more than triple that contained in a kilo of meat.

Legumes contain twice as much magnesium as rice, 4 to 5 times as much potassium as meat, and a significant amount of calcium and iodine.

They also contain all of the water-soluble vitamins, also known as the B group, which play a key role in cellular metabolism.

An excellent meat substitute

Our clients will be interested to know that, from a nutritional perspective, legumes go particularly well with grains. The way in which these two food groups complement each other in the kind and the quality of their proteins makes this combination the only true substitute for meat. Unlike meat, the proteins contained in legumes do not, in themselves, have a high biological value: they are rich in lysine but have a low level of methionine. In grains, this imbalance is reversed, so, taken together, the proteins are complementary and their "biological value" is increased. It should also be noted that legumes do not contain the saturated fats, sodium or cholesterol that usually go along with products of animal origin. Consumers also avoid other risks that are associated with meat consumption and that are currently causing such high levels of concern: mad cows and illegal residues in meat. Legumes are, of course, also ideal for vegetarians and those with elevated levels of cholesterol or uric acid.

Other nutritional benefits

Consumption of legumes has been found to be associated with reduced rates of cancer and chronic disease.

Recent studies have shown that the colourful outer coverings contain flavonoid pigments, which have an antioxidant (anti-ageing) effect just like that of similar components found in vegetables or in wine.

In conclusion, legumes are an essential component of a vegetarian diet, but it should be noted that they are not recommended in cases of colitis or dyspepsia, or for those following low-fibre diets. They are economical, and can be a useful element in the context of a Western diet that tends to include an excess of animal fat. Many of our clients would like to find alternatives to meat and to broaden their culinary and nutritional horizons.