

Steve Sando: So we're just getting settled, but I want to welcome you. This is our second event for Three Days of Love, Peace, and Beans. We wanted to ask too, how many Bean Club members are here? So sorry. It's not a cult. It's not a cult.

Speaker 2: Give yourselves a round of applause.

Steve Sando: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Listen, I know there's a waiting list because I'm on it.

Jerusha Klemper...: I'm Jerusha Klemperer and this is What You're Eating, a project of foodprint.org. We aim to help you understand how your food gets to your plate and see the full impact of the food system on animals, planet and people. We uncover the problems with the industrial food system and offer examples of more sustainable practices as well as practical advice for how you can help support a better system through the food that you buy and the system changes you push for. Today we're here to talk about beans.

Steve Sando: My name's Steve Sando and I founded Rancho Gordo in 2001. I was going through a personal crisis where I thought, you're just a screw-up. Nothing is working. Get a garden and a job at Target because I had been very ambitious and done a lot of things up until then, and nothing ever seemed to work. So I started gardening and then nature took its course, so to speak, and it's like, oh, I'm good at this, which I wasn't, but I felt I was. And I started taking things to the farmer's market. In 2001, nobody was eating heirloom beans. I think starting at 40, I understood this opportunity isn't going to come back. And once I saw little kernels of success and the spark in people, I thought, I need to do everything I can to make this work. So that's how it started.

Jerusha Klemper...: If you go looking for bean freaks, the road will lead you to Steve Sando and the Rancho Gordo Heirloom Bean Club. Everyone knows this. And if you want to find the bean freaks in one place — in real life that is, not online where they gather in the invit- only Bean Club Facebook group, head to the Encuentro, an heirloom bean festival featuring Rancho Gordo and hosted by Santa Ana California's Alta Baja Market.

Steve Sando: Delilah Snell, who owns Alta Baja was bugging me for years to do something like this. She kept calling it Gordo Con and that was going to be what this would be. And finally I thought, "Well, let's try it." It seemed like a fun thing to do. We call it Three Days of Love, Peace, and Beans. And it's really where bean freaks can fly their flag as high as they liked. Every event is bean-related.

Jerusha Klemper...: The event is hosted in a city that boasts one of the largest Mexican populations outside of Mexico and consists of an evening of bean storytelling, a drag queen bean bingo brunch, a five course bean supper, and more. Every event was sold out.

Speaker 2: Far left-hand corner, we've got the Good Mother Stallard Bean on this card. And then we're also going to announce number 10 because some of the beans are illustrations of beans, some of them are dishes you can make with the beans, and some of them are the bean plants themselves.

Steve Sando: And then once they get a complete row, what do they do?

Speaker 2: So do we want them to say bingo or do we want them to try to say loteria?

Steve Sando: Loteria! Let's make it tough.

Speaker 2: Yeah, let's get festive. Okay.

Sandhya : Hi, my name is Sandhya and I love beans. I'm a huge big bean fan.

Joe: I'm Joe, I'm Sandhya's lucky husband, but I do love beans, all kinds, prepared all different ways.

Sandhya : We're in Santa Ana at the Fourth Street market. We just attended a drag brunch bean bingo, which was fabulous. It's a wonderful time.

Joe: And I won the grand prize. I actually won two [foreign language 00:03:33], a minor prize, and then the grand prize. So I feel very lucky. This is very cool. Yeah, we look forward to this every year.

Sandhya : So we joined the Bean Club back in early 2019, I think.

Joe: Wow.

Steve Sando: We started out one afternoon thinking we heard about another wine club in Napa, and I thought, well, who needs another stupid wine club? I don't need that at all, but you know what would be so ridiculous is let's do a bean club. It's so idiotic that it'd be fun. So now we just went up to 30,000 members and we've got a wait list of 25,000 now. That varies a lot, so we can't keep up. And I love these people more than anybody because they will do what I say, and that trust is so sacred. I would never do a bad bean or a bum recipe because they get six beans a quarter and something extra and a newsletter in a rather decorative box. So it's a good deal for them and me.

Sandhya : Yeah, so I started as vegetarian about 20 years ago and slowly started moving towards veganism, and that really helped open my eyes to even becoming vegetarian to ingredients that I used to not really think I liked. Things like mushrooms, even tomatoes, sadly, because I had had lackluster ones that weren't prepared the way I like them, and in really good quality, really well-prepared or not necessarily to my taste. So once I started cooking more and exploring, I realized that I love a lot of things that I thought that I hated. And with beans, I had never had anything other than commodity beans. And my

sister, my younger sister actually said like, "Hey, if you're going more towards vegan, you got to try these beans." And I looked at Rancho Gordo and I'm like, "Oh, these are really expensive." And my sister's like, "No, they're not." And I was like, "Oh, yeah, you're right."

And then I bought some, actually Joe, my husband, he bought me the heirloom bean guide and some beans right here from Alta Baja, and we tried them. I think they were Christmas limas. And I was like, "These are so delicious. What is this? I've never had anything like it." And it's opened a whole new world to cuisine. And I think we were talking about the kind of idea like beans replacing meat, but I think it's more thinking of beans as the hardiness and giving you the dense protein and the real kind of bulk hardiness of a dish. So they're very much a center of the plate food, especially some of these big beans. And you can do almost everything you do with meat, you can do with beans and just really make a filling, hearty, satisfying, delicious dish for people who eat anything, like people of all persuasions, hardcore meat eaters, vegans, gluten-free, et cetera. You can satisfy a lot of tastes.

And some of these beans, I mean when you just cook them in water, a little splash of oil if you want, onion, garlic, a bay leaf maybe, they make their own broth where you're like, what is in this? Some of them taste, like, cheesy, some of them taste ... there's the Eye of the Goat, tastes almost like ham. And I was like, what is this? It makes its own broth. It's its own stock, and you can just sit there over the cooking pot and just eat it with a spoon. It's just absolutely delicious.

Joe: What's the one that's like potatoes?

Sandhya : Oh, I think Ayacote Blancos taste like potatoes, super potato-y.

Joe: I love potatoes. But of course I love ... Well, I love beans too.

Sandhya : Yeah. So in my family, they're from South India. I have a lot of familiarity with all kinds of lentils, but not so much with beans. We would use things like chickpeas if that. So there's so many kinds of beans. There's this entire world of them, and Rancho Gordo has opened our eyes to a lot of that.

Gustavo Arrellano: How many of you're going to the supper on Sunday? Raise your hand. Okay, now all of you, you see, so this is why we did this because the supper is going to be absolutely amazing, five amazing chefs. But we figured we have so many chef friends so all of you get to eat 3 amazing dishes for, what was it, 20 bucks? That's a deal and a half for whatever it was. I'm just saying. And not only that, if we're going to get people together, then we have to entertain y'all. So there's many events talking about life, making people laugh, making people cry. But this is the only hour I would dare say that is about beans. Cynthia Rebolledo is a former food editor for OC Weekly, current food critic, absolutely amazing writer, total [foreign language 00:07:53]. She's going to give you, even though you're going to

have nothing but beans this weekend, there's always a life of beans to be had here in Santana. So Cynthia's going to tell us about some spots. Cynthia, come on up.

Cynthia Rebolle...: Beans. They're humble and small, but they've shaped migrations, fed generations and anchored meals across continents. You can follow a trail of beans and trace history itself. The hands that soaked them, the machacadoras that smashed them, the tables they gathered people around. In Orange County where [taquerias and pupuserias coexist like friends, beans, they're the pulse of belonging. They're what connects Anaheim to Zacatecas, Santana to San Salvador, to the kitchens our grandparents built their lives around. Let me start with one of my favorite expressions of that: enfrijoladas

At Potzolcano in Santa Ana, they serve enfrijoladas. These tortillas fried just enough to hold their shape, hold it around tender chicken and blanket it with the velvety rich bean sauce made from the pinto variety. It's covered with fits of spicy chorizo, crema and crumbles of panela cheese. But the real star is that sauce. It's thick and earthy, coating the tortillas like a warm memory. It's the kind of bean sauce that tastes like it's been perfected over generations. Beans of this form are more than sustenance. They're a reminder that even the most unassuming ingredients can become transcendent.

Speaker 6: This following person is a very close friend of Cynthia. They've been friends since high school and here they are, united in beans. Chef Ryan Garlitos is the head of Le Hut Dinette in Santa Ana.

Ryan Garlitos: When I think back on my childhood relationship with beans, I can't recall many positive beanexperiences outside of the limited legume usage in my grandma's home cooking, instead my exposure to beans within the awful bean and cheese chalupa, an abomination of canned refried beans, texturally reminiscent of wet sand. But I think my negative opinion of beans was also influenced by some slanderous anti-bean propaganda that was fed to me as a child. Down on their luck characters in TV and movies who had no other belongings in the world would often happen to have a can of beans on them. I think of a Mickey Mouse cartoon in which he was so poor he had to slice a single bean paper thin to share with Goofy and Donald. And of course there was the famous schoolyard song about beans being a magical fruit and the gastrointestinal orchestra it would manifest when eating too many of them. I won't recite that song for you. I'm sure y'all know how it goes.

Joe Yonan: I am Joe Yonan. I am a cookbook author most recently of Mastering The Art of Plant-Based cooking, and before that, Cool Beans. Recently semi-retired from being food and dining editor at The Washington Post for many years. And now I'm writing a newsletter called Eat At Joe's on beehiv. When I first started writing Cool Beans, working on Cool Beans, I thought, wow, how am I going to write 125 recipes with beans? And by the time I was done, honestly, this is no joke, I thought, how can I stop? The ideas just would not stop. And beans among other

things are incredibly versatile. They're the only food that's classified as both a protein and a vegetable by the USDA, which is super interesting. So they can play all sorts of different parts in a meal. They can be the starch, they can be the protein, they can be both, they can be the garnish, they can be the sauce, they can be the dip, the grain. They can be so many different things.

And I just thought my whole life that they were delicious. You can get a pound of beans, even the beautiful Rancho Gordo beans, which I love. Sometimes people think that they're on the expensive side, but \$6 for something that's going to give you 8 servings is pretty amazing. So yeah, I love the taste, the texture, the versatility, the variety, they're filling. I feel satisfied when I eat them. So yeah, they make me feel good.

Jerusha Klemper...: Oh, see, we're getting onto a catchphrase here like, beans: they'll make you feel good.

Joe Yonan: They'll make you feel good. I love it.

Jerusha Klemper...: Right. But why should beans need a catchphrase? Why do some people, not the Rancho Gordo bean freaks, of course, but why do some people need convincing that beans are worth eating, worth centering on the plate and making the star? I mean, lots of foods have machines behind them creating ad campaigns and generating buzz. The Dairy Checkoff program gave us Got Milk. The pork board gave us, "Pork, the other white meat." So why not beans, they'll make you feel good? The thing about beans is that they are very good for you and also extremely good for the planet and culturally appropriate for a huge number of people from a wide variety of cultures. They have all the protein that the protein freaks are wanting right now, and they are very affordable during a time of true economic hardship. Also, they're delicious. They shouldn't need a PR push, but I'm thinking they do.

Joe Yonan: Beans are a staple in ... I can't think of many cultures around the world that beans are not a staple in. And they've been such a big part of so-called to use the Italian, the so-called cucina povera, the cooking of poverty, which is frugal and nutritious and low-waste and economically sustainable, and beans just are a huge part of that. I think here in the States, one of the reasons I think that beans may not have gotten as much love here as they have in other parts of the world is because I think that we have traditionally paid so much attention trends that started from upscale restaurants and higher upper classes, and that's not really true in a lot of other parts of the world such as India. I think we've come around in recent years to appreciating more foods that demonstrate a thrifty impulse from smart cooks around the world. And beans really fit into that. I mean, honestly, it really is hard to think of any place in the world where beans aren't a huge part of the diet, and I don't want to live there, wherever that is.

Andrea Aliseda: My name is Andrea Aliseda. I'm a food writer, recipe developer and now cookbook author. I did publish Make It Plant-Based Mexican with Hachette as a

plant-based series earlier this spring. I am a huge fan of beans, and as someone who has been plant-based for a very long time, they have been such core to my diet. But just in general as a Mexican person, they've just been sort of core to my identity as well. My partner and I both decided to go vegan. I think it made me kind of reckon a lot with the fact of, I feel like a lot of culinary culture, and maybe not the best word to use, but being foodie kind of really fell in the realm of eating really rare meats. And so then I found myself being like, well, if I want to continue pursuing this journey into the culinary world and I'm not eating meat, does that make me any less of a person who enjoys food? And how much will I be able to consume and enjoy and learn to cook?

And so I definitely had to kind of think about those things. And then I just, very quickly, I started kind of going to the farmer's markets and I was like, oh my God, these vegetables, all these different varieties of vegetables and fruits and of course beans and herbs, and it just opened up my mind and my stomach to this very vast, beautiful, colorful, delicious world of produce that we do have.

I think you're speaking to someone who's very not purest about the way she cooks with Mexican food. I think as long as you have a good intention outside of the Mexican culture, I think absolutely taking some creative license with beans, I think it's fine. I think it's great. In my cookbook, I do have the garbanzo ceviche. I am definitely very excited about using beans in different ways that maybe we're not necessarily super accustomed to just because they are so multidimensional and I mean they have such a wide range of characteristics as well. Some are going to be so much more creamy, some are going to be more starchy, and I feel like they can lend itself to being used in different applications.

Jerusha Klemper...: I found this beautiful essay that you wrote for Whetstone. You describe this ritual that you have for making a pot of beans.

Andrea Aliseda: It's very ritualistic in the sense that it's kind of always sort of the same steps. And I enjoy our traditional cuisine so, so, so much, and I honor that so, so much. And I think one of the ways in which I do is through this very humble kind of pot of beans, and it's something that my mom used to make very much growing up. And so I have my olla, which is a,, it's a clay pot, and she had her own and I have mine now. And so it's kind of like using that same instrument that's so ancestral to our culture. So what I do is first you have to, obviously you pick your beans, which I love pinto beans, and I'm very constantly kind of getting the pinto beans, but really like to explore different types of beans because there's so many. So I'll pick a bean, I have to sort through them because sometimes they can have little rocks and as tender as they can become, you definitely don't want to break a tooth eating a rock. So I got to sort through them.

Then I soak them, and I know that a lot of people have differing opinions about whether to soak your beans or not. Even if my beans are fresh, I don't know, I just got to soak them. I think it just does a really good job of hydrating them before you cook them. And so it cuts your cooking time in half. And anyway, so

they get soaked and they will get soaked usually overnight. I feel like that's kind of the best way to do it because then you're not in a hurry. You're just kind of taking its sweet time, you can keep doing other things. And then I rinse. I rinse that liquid. I have them rinsed. I put them in my pot with water. The typical way I'll flavor them is with onion, garlic, fresh chile, a dried chile and some type of herb and some olive oil. And then I let them come to a boil, and then I bring the heat back down so they can simmer for I feel like it's about an hour. And then I don't salt them until they're fully soft.

I don't know how people do it where they salt them before, and I'm glad that works for them, but it never works for me. They're always so rock hard and I'm like, I don't know how that works. But you know what? Props to you if that's you listening to this, but yeah, salt them at the very end. Let them cook a little bit longer. And then you have this just beautiful bowl of beans, which are jewels of Mexican cuisine.

Jerusha Klemper...: Beans. They're so sustainable, they're so delicious, they're so accessible. Everyone should be eating beans all the time, and they're kind of not. What do you think the holdup is?

Andrea Aliseda: Maybe they're misunderstood. Maybe this is not the best thing to talk about, but I know for a lot of people it can be upsetting to their gastrointestinal system.

Joe Yonan: I devote a whole page to it in Cool Beans. The headline, I think is Let the Music Play. And it's unavoidable to talk about beans very much without talking about the flatulence, but there are ways to help it. One of my favorite ways is to eat more beans, and this has been proven in studies. They did a study of people who added a half a cup of beans to their diet a day. This is particularly for people who hadn't been eating a lot of beans already, add a half a cup of beans to their diet every day and for the first two or three weeks, yeah, they experienced more flatulence. But after two or three weeks, it went down remarkably. That's probably the easiest way if you're particularly sensitive, soaking and pressure-cooking also reduce the ... It's these compounds called oligosaccharides that we don't have quite the enzymes to digest in the way that we do other things. They create gas in our stomachs. Other high-fiber foods do too, but beans tend to be the one that people notice the most.

You can also cook dried beans with kombu. Kombu actually has that enzyme, so does Beano. It's the same enzyme that Beano, the commercial product that for people who are particularly sensitive, you take a little Beano when you eat beans and it really helps. Kombu does that too. There are other ingredients that people talk about. It's a little bit hard to know whether ... The studies haven't really shown that there's a super strong connection, but epazote in Mexican cooking, asafoetida in Indian cooking, ginger. But mostly I like to tell people about the eat more beans strategy, which works, works really well.

Jerusha Klemper...: If all this sorting and soaking and stirring sounds like it takes too long and it wouldn't work for you, you've got options. For starters, there are other pulses that are bean-adjacent. Have you ever cooked a lentil? It's an extremely fast process, especially if they're the red ones, so popular in staple South Asian dolls or the tiny black lentils so small they could be a hat for an itty bitty animated shell with googly eyes. But also there are canned beans. Some new fun brands are doing canned beans with tasty sauces already in the can. There are brined beans in jars, even dehydrated crunchy lupini beans and pouches like snacks.

Joe Yonan: I love canned beans. I love canned beans. I mean, okay, one of the reasons that I really got into beans was because I started buying really interesting varieties from a place like Rancho Gordo, which the beautiful thing about heirloom beans is not just that they cook up so much better, but that you can get varieties of beans that you can't get canned, you can't get any other way. That's changing. You can get a lot more varieties of beans canned. But more importantly, canned beans are an excellent product. They're just an excellent product. I truly believe that they're right up there at the top of vegetables and legumes and any kind of plant-based food that excels in its canned form, it doesn't lose a ton in its canned form. Right up there with tomatoes. Nobody would say, "Oh, I would never open a can of tomatoes."

And the thing about canned beans is that they're ready when you are. And that is the single biggest obstacle I think that a lot of people have about cooking beans is that they feel like that if they didn't already plan to cook the beans yesterday, it is too late. They're behind. They can't do it. They have to soak them. They have to spend all this time cooking them, which we can talk about too, isn't really true.

But canned beans, I have tons of canned beans in my pantry. I mean, I have tons of dried beans, but I also have tons of canned beans. If I'm going to put chickpeas in a salad, I don't feel like I need to have chickpeas that I've cooked from scratch. If I want to make a hummus in honestly 90 seconds, I can do it with canned chickpeas. Kidney beans, I love canned kidney beans. Black beans, really all of them. And there's no shame. There's absolutely no shame in them. I think that when you cook beans from dried, the way I like to think about it is that you're getting a secondary product that's incredibly valuable in the kitchen, which is the bean cooking liquid. It's great to freeze the beans in. It's delicious. It's got body. You can add it to other soups and stews and all sorts of things. But the canned beans are still really good.

Jerusha Klemper...: When it comes to protein, if we all ate less meat and more, it would be a terrific win for the environment. Beans are a better choice than beef, for example, because it carries a heavy greenhouse gas load and is a top contributor to climate change. Beans are a better choice than chicken since chicken production heavily pollutes the air and water. No need for all the technology and investment in imitation meat burgers or burgers grown in labs. Beans are right there. They're very easy to make into a burger form and enjoy. They are right there.

Steve Sando:

I do find sometimes when you, and I'm not saying you would do this, but to hit people over the head with, you need to eat beans because it's good for the Earth and it's good for your health. And we really early, really early, Thomas Keller at French Laundry was one of my first customers where no one was buying the beans. I was thinking, how do I discount these? Because these are very expensive to grow, the heirlooms. How do I appeal to, at that point, it was people from the Depression who were not interested in buying the beans, but they wanted to talk about them lovingly, or people who had bought at food co-ops who expected them to be dirt cheap and 20 years old? But that wasn't what I had. And meeting Keller and having him validate what I was doing really made me think, okay, this is a great delicious item that we've taken for granted, and I'll start there.

And then by the way, they're incredibly healthy, and by the way, they're incredibly green. Even industrial beans are green. They actually help the soil rather than deplete it. So I did start with that, and I did find also when I did go down the road of green and healthy, people don't buy moral food. They want to, and the people that are loudest about it are the ones that don't actually give you the money. So I thought, let's just make it delicious and make you feel good about it. So that's how I've approached it up until now. There might be a smarter, better way that could go even further, but my technique has always been: they're delicious so of course you should be eating them. And they're an indigenous product of the Americas. Before Columbus and the Columbian Exchange, there were no beans in Europe or Asia. I mean there were favas and lentils and maybe one more, garbanzos, but beans were really a product of the Americas. That's also something I took pride in.

Jerusha Klemper....:

Maybe some people think beans are too exclusive. So yes, there's an awesome heirloom bean club and it has a wait list, and maybe you're thinking, oh, I can't enjoy beans until there's room in the club. Well, you're wrong about that. Besides the fact that you can absolutely buy Rancho Gordo beans on their website in individual bags or in various gourmet shops around the country, there are lots of other wonderful beans to buy from other dried bean companies like Camellia Beans or Primary Beans, from the farmer's market. In the Northeast, for example, there's a wonderful bean farming collective called Buttermilk Beans. You used to have to live near one of their drop-off or pick-up points, but now they sell their gorgeous beans online and they ship them anywhere.

Kristen Loria:

My name is Kristen Loria. I'm the founder of Buttermilk Bean, and we're based in the Finger Lakes at New York State, just outside Ithaca. And I am a bean grower, and I would say a bean sort of processor and distributor. We really work as a collective, and we are growing on various scales. We are all certified organic producers, and we wanted to really tell the story of beans in our region. It's a big crop historically for New York State that has evolved over time. New York State was once the top producer of dry beans in the entire country, so this was in the early 1800s and we were growing hundreds of thousands of acres of dry beans

here in New York State. Historically, we were the real bean basket, if you will, for the country.

So we are marketing directly. We have a local bean share that goes out to our community here in the Finger Lakes in the Ithaca area. We've also done some pickups in the Hudson Valley of New York State, and we also, fortunately for us, beans are really easy to ship in the mail.

Certainly it has been helpful to us that the concept of heirloom beans came to the forefront of many people's consciousness over maybe 15 years or so, 10 years. And it opens the door for people to think about it as not a sort of commodity type of food. It's always hard to whittle down how many varieties we're growing. We try different ones each year, and we all have our favorites, so we'll grow maybe a type of cranberry bean. I think a lot of people have heard of those. A really well-known heirloom bean is Jacob's Cattle or maybe Yellow Eye, so people have probably heard of those. Tiger's Eye is another favorite, and that's a really striking delicious one.

Something that I like to tell the story of is heirloom is kind of an interesting word, and so a lot of these varieties are truly really old, but there's also a fun story thinking about, oh, what if we're selecting new varieties ourselves and growing them on our farms? Some of the varieties we grow, for example, one's called Purple Stardust, and it was bred by a sort of backyard bean breeder named Robert Lobitz, and he developed a lot of different varieties and they all kind of were released in informal seed sharing networks. So Purple Stardust is kind of a fun, it's like this groovy purple speckly bean, and I just really like the name. And that's kind of a more obscure heirloom you might say.

Jerusha Klemper...: Yeah, I've never heard of that. It sounds amazing. And maybe would be the bean that would get my daughter to eat beans, maybe. I don't know. I got to buy some of those. Is the reason that you are in growth mode as Buttermilk Bean because there is a huge demand for beans?

Kristen Loria: Yeah. Yeah. I think we've more or less kind of doubled the number of shares we could offer each year, and I think that's mostly been a product of our own production model and growing our own farms. There is a lot of excitement. I guess it's a question I asked myself now that we're really trying to go forward. Hopefully the sky's the limit with bean share membership interests, but I think also as a new business, it just takes time for people to find you. But yeah, beans are having a moment, I think.

Jerusha Klemper...: So what advice do you have as I create this maybe fictional, maybe real bean campaign to get more people excited about beans?

Kristen Loria: Those beautiful beans, they're so photogenic. It's not really a fair fight. I mean, poor corn and wheat, it's just not the same. Beans, they're very beautiful.

Jerusha Klemper...: When you're trying to build a movement, it's good to scan the landscape. Who doesn't want you to succeed? Are there bean haters? Is there an anti-bean movement? It turns out, yes, in certain MAHA corners of the internet, there are people who say that beans are bad because of something called lectins. So I asked Joe Yonan to explain.

Joe Yonan: Oh, let me talk about lectins. Oh, I'm so glad you brought that up. All right, lectins are what are considered an anti-nutrient that are in a lot of foods, including beans, and they've gotten a really bad rap from some circles for making beans not good for you and for supposedly bringing out kind of the ... I mean it's extreme, but the more toxic kind of qualities of beans, which A, it's not really true. B, the thing that's so funny about it is that lectins are destroyed by cooking, so nobody eats a bean raw. And the reason that lectins even came into the conversation is because there were a few cases many years ago of people who used a slow cooker to cook, particularly cook kidney beans and kidney beans have a particularly high level of lectins and they undercooked them, and the slow cooker never really got hot enough, and so people got sick. Nobody died, but people got sick, and that can happen.

But if you cook the beans thoroughly, if you are cooking beans from dried and you boil them vigorously for the first few minutes, that's like your total insurance policy. No canned bean has any lectins left in it. No fully cooked bean, no hummus, no chili, no soft bean or even tender enough to eat bean is anything to worry about. So I consider it a non-issue.

Jerusha Klemper...: If we do craft a campaign to get people to eat more beans, to get the whole world cuckoo, crazy obsessed, like a bunch of Rancho Gordo Bean Club members, how should we do it and who should we target?

Eve Turow-Paul: Hi, my name is Eve Turow-Paul. I'm the founder and executive director of Food for Climate League. Soon to change our name so stay tuned. And at Food for Climate League, we work on changing the way people think and talk about sustainable food choices to make it easier, more alluring, more culturally relevant to the masses. And if you're using really wonky terms, we use narrative design and behavioral design to make climate smart food choices the norm. And for the last three years, we have been working on how to talk about beans to make them more enticing, more attractive, not just to eaters, but also to food service operators. It's not a simple answer as to what is climate smart. But there are a select few number of ingredients on this planet that by and large are sustainable and beans and the category, the larger category of pulses fits within that.

So I will go through a few of the reasons why they are so sustainable. Pulses in general and pulses are a family that includes beans, peas, and lentils. Legumes are also related and include things like peanuts, soy, and these plants are nitrogen fixers. It means they naturally put more nitrogen into the soil. When you're often reading stories about algae blooms and synthetic fertilizers, it's

often the result of synthetically applied nitrogen. If we are incentivizing farmers to instead just plant some beans, we're getting that nitrogen in the ground in a natural way, and it's often a part of a crop rotation. So it's really important that we are rewarding farmers who are utilizing pulses and legumes with profits. We need to be driving markets for these foods. So that's one reason why they're sustainable. So they're really great for soil health.

The other reason is they have a very low carbon footprint, and beans are this super power. They're protein packed, they're fiber full, they're really great for human health. And if you look at also the diets, like the Blue Zones diets that represent what people eat who live the longest, it's beans. In every single Blue Zone diet, there is some form of a pulse that is kind of a staple of people's diets. So there's many different reasons. It's also culturally relevant to the masses. It's one of these kind of beautiful categories of foods where almost every culture has a bean, pea or lentil dish that is core to that culture that represents that culture and it's shelf stable.

Jerusha Klemper...: That's great. I just want to flag too, that I've been using these interviews to hear naturally occurring slogans for beans that just emerge from bean enthusiasts' mouths and you whispering, "It's beans." I was like, that's a good one right there. You are considered kind of an expert on what this cohort, cadre of Millennial, Gen Z eaters, what motivates them as they make food choices. How did this come to be your niche?

Eve Turow-Paul: So around 2010, I started to look into the rise of foodie culture. I myself am a Millennial. I graduated college in 2009 at the peak of the recession, moved to New York City to get my MFA in creative writing, which also means I was pretty broke and everyone in my program was also pretty broke, and we were living in one of the most expensive cities in the United States. But what was happening is whenever there was a break in conversation at class, people were pulling out their phones and talking about where they had gone to dinner that night. And I was just confused.

With the rise of the digital age, and mind you, 2010 is the year that Instagram came out. So with the rise of the digital age, with the start of this recession, why is it that Millennials have been spending so much time and income on food and food media? And now 15 years later, I've written 2 books on the subject. I have traveled around the world doing this research. I am endlessly fascinated by this.

Long story short is to answer this question of the why behind the rise of the foodie movement, you have to look at rising rates of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression. And there are very strong correlations as well to the impact of the digital age. And there's other societal changes that are just happening around the world that are contributing to really these mental health struggles. And a lot of the work that I have done professionally prior to Food for Climate League was really thinking about the ways that people use food as a coping

mechanism for those record high rates of stress, depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

But the vast majority of the population is using food to help them feel safe and in control. They're using food to help them feel a sense of community and belonging, or they're using food to create a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. How do beings fulfill some of those core needs emotionally? We know all the physical benefits, we know the planetary benefits, but human beings are not rational. If we were then the produce board and everyone's selling vegetables would not be trying so hard. We don't make rational decisions a lot of the time. It's very emotional.

And as you mentioned, the focus really is on Millennial and Gen Z demographics, and this is just over half of the global population. These generations are also really driving discretionary spending. And Food for Climate League is focused on long-term culture change and systems change. And I apologize to the Gen Xers and Baby Boomers of the world, but really for long-term change, we got to be focusing on Millennial, Gen Z and now Gen Alpha populations. And so for our beans research, we did focus in on those age demographics.

The first thing we did is within that boundary of Millennial and Gen Z generations, we looked at, well, are there any other sub demographics or psychographics here that we should focus on? And we centered our work on well, who's already eating a lot of beans, who we don't need to be focused on, and who shows the greatest willingness to eat beans? And we ended up finding two subgroups. One is low income Millennial and Gen Zers, and the second is foodies. And sometimes there's overlap between those two groups. Sometimes there isn't.

And we began with, well, what's the bias here? Why aren't people eating them? We talked about the planetary benefits, the personal health benefits. There's also financial benefits to beans. They're really affordable and they're very easy. You just open a can. So the usual kind of barriers to consumption that we see with sustainable foods, they don't exist with beans. Very easily accessible. And what we ended up finding were really interesting barriers. For the foodie population, we saw that people just don't consider beans special. So if they want to be throwing a dinner party or they want to treat themselves, especially with Gen Z, there's a lot of treat yourself moments now in food culture, beans, they just don't see beans as the way to do it.

And with the low income demographic, we saw this belief that really people want to move past beans. They do see beans as a poverty food. There is a narrative in American culture that beans are a poverty food, and that makes sense because what's the number one thing people get from a food pantry? They get beans. And we ended up hearing from a lot of people essentially, "Listen, beans are my backup. Beans are in the back of the pantry from when times get really bad." And the next stage of the work was really thinking about,

well, okay, beyond the negative associations, what are the positive ones? And once you kind of peeled the layers back, we started to hear people talking about, "Well, actually I have this really great flavor memory of this bean or lentil or pea dish that I had with my grandmother or my grandfather when I was traveling back home," or whatever it might be.

And we found that there is a true nostalgic role of beans in people's flavor memories, that flavor was not the main thing holding people back. It really was kind of these other stigmas associated with it. And in our work, we've been able to kind of flip those things on its head. And that's the exciting part of this work. And everyone wants to be wrapped in a warm hug. And thankfully beans, peas and lentils really allow you to be wrapped in a warm hug because it really gets back to, well, what are the positive flavor memories people have? It always included people's family members, their grandparents, that these dishes are a sign of love. And so that's really the part of the story that we are leaning into in this moment. This is a very joyful campaign.

Jerusha Klemper...: And it sounds like you're not talking about in the messaging anywhere, this is awesome for the climate. That has taken a backseat.

Eve Turow-Paul: We know that the number of Americans who are alarmed and concerned about the climate crisis continues to grow across the political spectrum. And most people don't want to think about the apocalypse when they're eating. Food is love, food is joy, food is identity. It is our safety blanket. And so when you're talking about how to get people to eat something, it is not going to be because it's sustainable. And that doesn't mean that we're all bad people. It means that there is a certain level of coping that everybody is doing through their food choices.

Steve Sando: This is my favorite recipe for beans, believe it or not. The temptation is you want to keep charting them up and adding things. But simple, beautiful, freshly made heirloom beans. In this case, moro, are really the best. There's a little chopped onion, white onion or red, yellow probably want to [inaudible 00:46:33] in water first. A little squeeze of lime, the temptation's to put cheese, but I'm going to put a little hot sauce in. You know what? It doesn't get better than that.

Jerusha Klemper...: You're on YouTube, you're on TikTok. That is where the youngs are. To what degree is that something you think about? Making sure that young people are falling in love with beans?

Steve Sando: Well, if you're paying attention, they are. So they aren't eating as much meat. And I'm in Napa. They're not drinking as much wine, that's for sure. And I think they're really more inspirational. They also don't come with the baggage. We don't hear fart jokes. They think, oh, it's reasonable protein, and they really see it as an alternative to beef or something they want instead of beef or meat. And I'm an omnivore, by the way, and I hate to use the word authentic, but they can

smell it a mile off if it's a corporation trying to go for them. And I'm not. I'm just like, here's what I'm doing. I hope you like it. And they seem to be coming along.

And so at one point we talk about our demographic, especially in our store, it was an older woman from Petaluma in a Prius. I mean, that was who loved what we were doing. And now we get young hipsters coming in and they're in the Bean Club and they're cooking a lot more and it's like, oh, this is great. And I didn't try, but I think the secret is to be an example and just do it. And if you're doing something good, you'll find your audience.

Madeline: A lot of people have been wondering why on Earth I am only eating beans for the entire month. So I'll tell you about it while I eat one of my snacks. Basically, I love beans. I think beans are the greatest food ever. And if people could eat more beans, it would do amazing things, not only for your body, but for the planet as a whole.

Jerusha Klemper...: Steve Sando and the beaniacs aren't the only ones gathering groups of bean lovers together. A young woman who goes by Bean Supporter on Instagram and TikTok and who has become a bit of a bean influencer, recently held a bean potluck, which she called a bean up in Berkeley, California.

Madeline: All right, we've been asked for an ice breaker, which I support and I like. I'm going to share your name and you're going to share your favorite bean. I'm Madeline, but I also go by Bean Supporter and I develop bean recipes net near daily because I just want people to eat more beans. My favorite bean is the Royal Corona bean. This is a bean up, and it rained today, and I still had people come.

Nom: Hi everyone. My name is Nom, I go by she/her, and my favorite bean is pinto beans.

Julia: Hi, I am Julia. She/her pronouns. I think I just like black beans.

Claire: Hi. Claire. She-they. I think I'm going to have to say soybeans because of all of the different products you can make out of them.

Madeline: So back in 2017, I was having a lot of health issues and I couldn't really figure out what was wrong, and I kept getting a lot of blood tests done and I was told it was just stress. But then in a kind of form of desperation, I came into eating a ton of beans and eating beans like five, six plus times a day, and my world was forever changed. All of my health issues kind of started to fade away and my life completely changed and I got my life back. So not only are beans great for the planet and affordable, but they absolutely changed my life.

Monica: I'm Monica, she/her, and yeah, I love chickpeas instant, I'll put them in things that don't require them. They're really good. They're the base of most of my food.

Madeline: Have you had a black chickpea?

Monica: No, I haven't.

Madeline: I haven't either, but-

Monica: Okay. I was like ...

Speaker 19: They're really good. Yeah, they have a deep nuttiness and they make a really nice broth.

Madeline: So I did only eat beans for 30 days. It's day 30 of only beans all month long. Here we have some crispy butter beans and they taste just like tater tots. I was trying to figure out how to get people to eat more beans, and I was on the phone with my friend and he said, "What if you only ate beans for 30 days?" And I was like, "You're a genius." And then he was like, "No, that was fully a joke. You shouldn't actually only eat beans for 30 days." And I was like, "No, I should only eat beans for 30 days. And if I only eat beans for 30 days and take it online, there's a chance that I actually might gain traction because beans aren't sexy and no one likes beans and people think beans are a gross food. But if I make kind of a meme of it by only eating beans, then maybe, just maybe people start eating beans and I'll gain some traction." So that's what I did.

I don't think anyone should only eat one food for 30 days. I don't advocate only eating beans for 30 days. I advocate eating beans every day for 30 days. I advocate eating beans every day for the past nine years basically, if you're me, and hopefully for the rest of my life, I'll continue eating beans almost daily. Some people are like, "You should be Bean Queen." I'm like, "No, I'm not the queen of the beans. They reign me. I don't reign them. I'm just here to make them rise in popularity."

Jerusha Klemper...: In your parting column from The Washington Post, you wrote really eloquently about basically not yucking other people's yums, about not being preachy, especially around not eating meat or eating less meat. And I wonder what lessons can you offer us in creating a bean campaign? How can we convince the world to eat less meat and eat more beans or other things? But today we're here to talk about beans.

Joe Yonan: I suddenly am wondering whether an effective campaign would just be: eat more beans. And then the idea that ... I mean, something has to give unless everybody's just going to eat more beans and still eat the same, add 500 calories of beans to your diet every day and everybody gain weight. No, something's going to shift. Something's going to come off. So I wonder if the emphasis is just eat more beans. Beans are delicious. They're easy to cook. They're there for you in all sorts of ways. You can do all sorts of things with them. They're so good for you. They're good for your gut health, they're great for the planet, they fix the nitrogen in the soil, they're the cheapest form of protein on the planet, they're

shelf stable. What other protein is shelf stable and cheap? So maybe that's the way to do it, to focus on the accessibility, the deliciousness, the affordability, and just be doubling down on here's what's so great about beans.

Speaker 2: How are we feeling y'all? How is the meal sitting? It was delicious, wasn't it? Incredible. Y'all are such a wonderful group. I love it when you get a room full of people who all love the same thing because just you can sort of feel it in the air. It's really exciting. Steve loves to say that it's not a cult. I'm pretty sure even in the book he says that it's not a cult. But I don't know.

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