



An assortment of heirloom beans from Foggy River Farms, Rancho Gordo and Tierra Vegetables.

Photos courtesy of Epicurean Group

Dominican University Joins Slow Bean Movement

Students at Dominican University of California in San Rafael are enjoying a new nutrient dense, sustainable offering, thanks to its campus foodservice provider Epicurean Group.

The chief executive officer of Epicurean Group, Mary Clark Bartlett, was introduced to the “Slow Beans” concept at the Slow Food global conference, Terra Madre Salone del Gusto, in Turin, Italy, in September 2016, where she served as a U.S. delegate.

Beans are also considered to be a sustainable agriculture product. Typically, they are grown with less water and they provide the added benefit of increasing soil fertility, thus reducing the need for manufactured nitrogen fertilizers. Beans are “climate smart” — they have a smaller carbon footprint



Jacob's Cattle Heirloom Bean Stew with Tomato, Farro, and Kale

A Slow Beans Primer

Why the name?

- Slow** = Soak and cook time
Need a good amount of time in the pot
- Slow** = Sustainable
Earth friendly, economically sound
- Slow** = Support biodiversity, heirloom foods
Demand encourages supply

Benefits of Beans:

- Nutrient dense protein
 - Minerals
 - B vitamins
 - Micronutrients
- Contributes to food security at all levels
- Fosters sustainable agriculture
- Mitigates climate change with healthy soils

than meat and many other vegetables. Growing and eating heirloom beans increases food system biodiversity, which is crucial to food security.

The concept was launched at all of Epicurean’s cafés and dining halls. “Bean dishes are a tasty and nutritious alternative to meat protein, and provide a complete protein when eaten together with cereals (grains),” said Harry Yee, executive chef at Dominican. “Beans are high in fiber, and can help fight

obesity and other chronic diseases.”

The program is a great fit for Meatless Mondays, and worked particularly well at the company’s Catholic schools on Fridays during Lent, where it increased the variety. “We do the beans in a lot of different ways — a three-bean salad, or tri-bean chili, or Tuscan stews,” said Yee. “They are dishes that are hearty. We will make our own black bean burgers. We try to be creative, so it is not just one style. I try to put in all types of cuisines from around the world because there is so much flavor out there, from American comfort to German, Greek, Saudi Arabian. We want to open their palates to something new that they can take with them.”

After an initial reluctance, students started taking to the program. “From the beginning, I built the trust with great food and healthy food for them. They are willing to try; they gave it a shot,” he said. “Now that it has been a couple of weeks, the students are getting more involved, they are trying it. They are also giving me feedback on the dishes, sometimes on how their moms and dads or grandmothers would use the beans.”

Education is also part of the program. “We had all of the information, and all of the research and how it helped us to be greener,” said Yee. “We put it on flyers and posted it in cafes. We have table tents that tell them what the benefits are from health to helping the Earth. We also talk to the students, too. When they have questions, my staff explains things to them.” —OCH



What are Heirloom Beans?

Heirloom beans have a history. Passed down through generations, they’re prized for their distinct color and flavor characteristics. Heirloom beans are traditionally grown by small farmers and therefore are harder to find than the generic, industrially-grown beans. According to Steve Sando, the founder of Rancho Gordo, “Heirloom beans tend to have a lower yield and can be much more difficult to grow, but the payoff is in the unique flavors and textures that you don’t find with bland commodity beans.”

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