



## NUTRITION NOTES

# CAN WE GET CANADIANS TO EAT MORE PULSES?

By Debra McLennan, RD,  
APG Food and Nutrition Coordinator

Interest in pulses has been growing over the years culminating in the United Nations declaring 2016 International Year of Pulses and the release in 2019 of the new Canada's Food Guide which focuses on increasing intake of plant-based foods. While consumers and health professionals acknowledge that pulses contribute to a healthy diet, we haven't really seen a huge increase in whole pulse consumption in Canada. The reasons are interesting, and the good news is that there are strategies that can help.

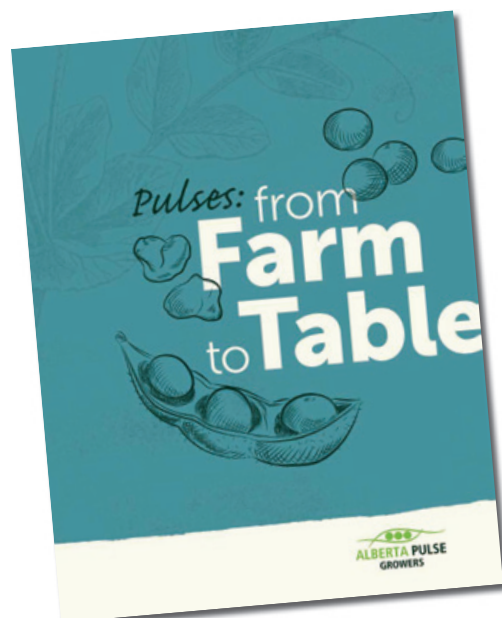
What does pulse consumption look like in Canada? A 2010 online Ipsos-Reid survey<sup>[1]</sup> of 1,100 Canadian consumers, 18+ years old, showed

that 80% of respondents had eaten pulses in the last six months while 20% had not. Of those who did eat pulses, the majority ate them at home and the most consumed pulse was beans, then peas closely followed by chickpeas and the least consumed was lentils. In the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey<sup>[2]</sup> of 20,156 Canadians aged 19+ years old, 13% consumed dry beans, peas or lentils; British Columbia had the highest pulse consumption at 17.6% and Quebec was the lowest at 10.4%. FYI, 11.3% of Albertans consumed pulses on any given day. Put another way, the western world consumes 3.5 kg pulses per capita per year while South America, India and Burundi consume 10-40 kg per capita per year<sup>[2]</sup>!

Why do people in the Western world consume so few pulses? In a 2015 Canadian study by Phillips<sup>[3]</sup>, 401 urban Saskatchewan caregivers aged 26-45 years old with children aged 3-11 years old completed a questionnaire that measured their nutrition knowledge and perceived benefits and barriers to eating lentils. The results showed that the caregivers perceive greater benefits than barriers to eating lentils and that they would like to include lentils more often in their family meals. Why don't they include more lentils? The top reasons included lack of knowledge on how to cook them and the belief that their family members wouldn't like them. In a 2005 Australian study by Lea<sup>[4]</sup> on consumers' beliefs about plant foods, lack of knowledge and skills, and length of time to prepare were the main barriers to eating plant-based foods. Fast forward to 2019 to a study by Figueira<sup>[5]</sup> looking at the knowledge, attitudes, consumption and culinary use of legumes in Australian consumers. This study had 505 people respond to an online survey and researchers found that those who do not eat legumes cited taste, lack of knowledge on how to include and prepare, time to prepare as well as family preference as reasons why. Interesting that the reasons why people do not eat pulses haven't really changed over the years, so the question is, what can we do?

Education is key for consumers and health professionals. Providing information on how to cook dry pulses and distinguishing between the different pulses and their soaking/cooking times is important. Many people are unaware that some pulses don't need to be soaked before cooking or that some pulses cook in the same amount of time as pasta or rice. Health professionals like dietitians also play a key role in this area. Providing support through print resources like recipes and cooking information as well as hands-on workshops

*Pulses: From Farm to Table is a workbook for health professionals, teachers, and community leaders who are interested in doing their own pulse food demonstrations or pulse workshops with their clients and students.*





*The Mediterranean Salad Bowl is one of many healthy recipes available on the APG website.*

will provide dietitians with tasty pulse recipes and cooking tips to help clients to overcome perceived barriers to pulse consumption.

Recipes that focus on incorporating pulses into existing family favourite dishes like spaghetti sauce, hamburgers or lasagna are an easy, tasty way to introduce pulses to the family. Developing recipes that have minimal and/or easy to find ingredients and minimal preparation for the first-time pulse user can help overcome the perception that pulses take a long time to prepare. Canned pulses offer the perfect solution for those

who don't have time to cook or don't want the hassle of dealing with dry pulses. These are all easy solutions that can be shared with consumers of all ages.

Lastly, food trends and dietary guidelines are also positively impacting pulse consumption. Plant-based protein started as a trend, but I think it's safe to say this trend is here to stay. The 2019 Canada's Food Guide recommends including plant-based protein foods such as beans and lentils. Dietary patterns like the Mediterranean Diet, influence pulse consumption as they continue to have a positive

impact on health outcomes for any population.

The key to influencing and increasing whole pulse consumption is getting information out to consumers. Building an effective website, social media presence and supporting resources will help consumers see that not only are pulses healthy, but they are an easy and tasty addition to any meal!

*Do you have a question about pulse nutrition? I would love to hear from you! You can contact me at [dmclennan@albertapulse.com](mailto:dmclennan@albertapulse.com) or (780) 986-9398 ext. 109.*

1. Ipsos-Reid. Government of Alberta. Factors influencing pulse consumption in Canada. 2010 [cited 2013 Jun 1]. Available from [www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/sis13117](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/sis13117).
2. Mudryj, A. Pulse Consumption in Canada: Analysis of Pulse Consumption in the Canadian Community Health Survey. 2011. Available from [mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/bitstream/handle/1993/4766/mudryj\\_adriana.pdf;sequence=1](http://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/bitstream/handle/1993/4766/mudryj_adriana.pdf;sequence=1)
3. Phillips T, et al. Perceived benefits and barriers surrounding lentil consumption in families with young children. *Can J Diet Pract Res.* 2015;76:3-8.
4. Lea, E, et al. Australian adult consumers' beliefs about plant foods: a qualitative study. *Health Educ Behav.* 2005;32(6):795-808.
5. Figueira, N, et al. Consumer understanding and culinary use of legumes in Australia. *Nutrients* 2019;11:1575.