



Mankind's ancient love affair with pulses

Once upon a time, Jack planted a magic bean that grew into a massive beanstalk. No wait, that's not right! Actually the story of mankind's love for pulses begins long before this.

It all began thousands of years ago in the Fertile Crescent (in the Middle East). People moved from place to place, hunting and gathering food. Then they realised that planting their own crops and settling down in one spot was much easier. This was made possible by planting wheat, barley and pulses (like peas, chickpeas and lentils). There are also written accounts about pulses in the Middle East thousands of years ago, such as the Bible story of Esau, who sold his birthright as the eldest to Jacob his younger twin, for some lentil stew.



2016 International Year of Pulses

The United Nations declared 2016 the International Year of Pulses so that they can tell everyone about the high nutritional content of pulses. Because pulses can do so much good for the world, they will motivate people to eat pulses as a source of protein and help solve farmers' pulse-growing problems.

Pulses save lives

Of all continents, maybe Europe loved pulses the most. Beans are said to have saved the Europeans from malnutrition during the Middle Ages. Apart from eating pulses, the Europeans found a way to make coffee from chickpeas! They also got rid of blood sucking bed bugs by using kidney bean leaves. These leaves had tiny hairs on them that pierced the bed bugs' legs, and the trapped bugs could then be burnt along with the leaves.



Today, pulses are still grown all over the world. Hopefully, their story will have a "happily ever after," because they can solve the world's looming food crisis, and that will help us to fall in love with them again.

Thousands of years ago

Pulses have been cultivated in the Americas for many thousands of years as well, and most of the beans we know today (called Phaseolus beans), come from there. In fact, they've found starch grains from beans in the teeth of some people from Peru from about 6000 years ago! Spanish explorers returning from the Americas brought the Phaseolus beans back to Europe in the 15th century AD.

Sold on the street

European countries already had chickpeas, lentils and peas before the introduction of Phaseolus beans. The well-known Greek poet, Homer, mentioned beans and chickpeas in a poem in 800 BC, and by 500 BC, pea soup was sold on the streets of Athens by street vendors. In the 3rd century BC, the Romans introduced broad beans to Britain, because they grew well in the cold climate there.

What are pulses again?

Pulses grow in pods and are harvested as dried seeds. The most well-known ones are dried beans, peas, lentils and chickpeas.



For more information visit www.iyp2016.org

