

Outside of Phoenix, Ramona Button is growing crops like tepary beans and 60-Day corn (pictured) that had practically disappeared. Get a taste at ramonafarms.com.



Healing with Heritage

Ramona Button is helping her community by growing nearly forgotten Native American crops By Joanna Meyer

WHO SHE IS

When Ramona Button was a nurse in her twenties in the Gila River Indian Community in the Sonoran Desert outside of Phoenix, she observed a steady increase in preventable diseases, like cardiovascular disease and diabetes, within her tribe. Indeed, her community has some of the highest rates of diabetes in the world. Ramona believed that a primary cause was that large grocery stores on the reservation didn't stock enough healthy, balanced foods or ethnic staples. The daughter of a healer and a farmer, Ramona decided to return to her roots in order to help her people.

WHAT SHE DID

Ramona and her husband, Terry Button, took over the farm that she grew up on. Digging through a chest of seeds her father had saved, Ramona discovered a jar of tepary beans. These small shell-ing beans were a primary component of her people's diet but had all but disappeared. Native to the Sonoran Desert, the small sweet-and-creamy beans are drought-tolerant. The Buttons planted the beans and perfected their production techniques. The tepary bean was back. Buoyed by their success, they also started growing other native crops, such as 60-Day corn and Pima Club wheat.

WHY ITS COOL

The Buttons' goal is to restore a passion for nutritious heirloom foods and to "teach younger generations to be proud of their heritage," Ramona says. She and her daughter, Brandy, use cooking demonstrations in their community as a vehicle to educate people about the nutritional benefits of tepary beans—their high fiber content can help control blood sugar. Their products are available in markets and restaurants throughout Arizona. Jennifer Russo, chef-owner at The Market Restaurant & Bar in Phoenix, is a tepary bean fan. "Their earthy flavor and creamy texture works well in so many dishes," she says. 🌽