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# Ramona Farms

## BRINGING BACK THE BAFV (TEPARY BEAN)

BY BEVERLY COX AND MARTIN JACOBS

**THE AKIMEL O'ODHAM** (Pima) "River People" have lived and farmed along the Gila River in south-central Arizona since long before Spanish explorers first arrived in the 16th century. Archaeological finds, and the Uto-Aztecan origin of their language, suggest that they are descendants of the Hohokam ("Those Who Have Gone Before" or "The Ancestors"), a prehistoric people who migrated north from Mexico and settled in this region more than 2,000 years ago.

The Hohokam were skilled agriculturalists. They constructed a sophisticated system of irrigation canals and dams that served as a model for later Anglo-American immigrants. The Akimel O'odham, like their ancient ancestors, were farmers. They grew tepary beans, corn, pumpkins, chiles and cotton, and they supplemented their diet by hunting and gathering wild foods. After European contact, they adopted wheat, cattle and other livestock introduced by the Spanish.

The O'odham were healthy, prosperous and generous in their dealings with other people. In the 1840s they welcomed the Maricopa, who, fleeing from hostile tribes, sought refuge among them.

In 1853, with the Gadsden Purchase, southern Arizona became part of the United States, and in 1859 Congress established the Gila River Indian Reservation for the Akimel O'odham and the Maricopa. Each community member was assigned a 10-acre parcel of irrigable land. But, beginning in the 1880s, diversion of water by non-Native farmers who settled upstream reduced the flow of the Gila through Indian lands. By the 1940s, lack of water devastated agriculture on the reservation, and the federal government began supplying Native communities with processed foods and canned goods that



Garbanzo bean field at Ramona Farms in Sacaton, Arizona.

were filling, but not healthy for a people with a genetic predisposition to diabetes.

Ramona Button (Akimel O'odham) is grateful that when she was growing up on the reservation, her parents kept the old ways. Her father, Francisco "Chiigo" Smith, grew tepary beans and other traditional crops on her mother's 10-acre allotment. Her mother, Margaret, was an herbalist and traditional healer. As Ramona fondly remembers, "Together, they taught me the value of our traditional foods as being important to our daily nutrition and way of life."

Ramona became a nurse and, like her mother, married a farmer. In 1974, she and her husband, Terry Button, started to farm on the same family allotment. In the late 1970s, they were asked by community elders to grow the *bafv* (teparry bean), which had nearly become extinct. Finding seeds was difficult, but one day, when looking around the old adobe house where she had grown up, Ramona and Terry discovered a few white and brown tepary beans

in a glass jar her father had left in a trunk. It became clear to them, especially with the urging of the elders, that helping to bring back the *bafv* to the community was to be their mission. That was the real beginning of Ramona Farms.

It has taken almost 40 years, but thanks to Chiigo Smith, a man of the land who looked to the future and saved seeds, and to the hard work of the Buttons and those who helped and encouraged them, Pima tepary beans have been rescued and are enjoying renewed popularity. Because they are higher in fiber and protein and have a lower glycemic index than other beans, tepary beans are considered by dietitians to be an ideal food for people with diabetes. They are also popular with top chefs, who rave about their nutty-sweet flavor and creamy texture. And agronomists, concerned about climate change, are excited by the fact that they are extremely drought tolerant. Like quinoa and agave nectar, this ancient Native American food appears to be back to stay. —





## Ramona's Traditional *Poshol*

Serves 4 to 6

- 1 pound brown tepary beans\*
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup Pima Club wheat kernels\*
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dried roasted 60-day Pima corn\*
- $\frac{1}{2}$  onion (quartered)
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and mashed
- $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cumin, to taste
- 2 whole dried red New Mexico chiles, rinsed
- Salt to taste
- $\frac{1}{4}$  pound bacon, fried and crumbled

Sort and rinse beans under cold water. Place them in a heavy pot with enough water to cover by 4 inches. Bring beans to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat, cover and set aside to soak for 1 hour.

Drain beans and return them to the pot with the wheat kernels, roasted corn, onion, garlic, cumin and chiles. Add enough fresh water to cover ingredients by 3 to 4 inches. Bring to a rapid boil, then reduce heat to very low, cover and simmer for 4 to 6 hours (or until tender). When beans are almost tender, add salt and complete the cooking. Stir in crumbled bacon and serve bowls of hot *poshol* with wedges of moist, agave-sweetened Pima Cornbread (recipe follows). *Poshol* is also great when simmered gently overnight in a slow cooker!

## Pima Cornbread

Serves 4 to 6

- 2 teaspoons butter
- 1 cup 60-day Pima corn flour\*
- 1 cup milk
- 1 egg, beaten
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup vegetable oil
- 2 to 4 tablespoons organic agave nectar, to taste
- 1 cup Pima Club wheat flour\*
- 3 teaspoons baking powder at sea level (reduce amount by  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon at 5,000 feet and by  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon at 10,000 feet)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 400°F. Butter the bottom and sides of an 8-inch round layer cake pan.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine corn flour, milk, egg, oil and agave nectar. In a separate bowl, mix together wheat flour, baking powder and salt.

Make a well in the middle of the wheat mixture and pour in the moist corn mixture. Fold mixtures together until well combined. Scrape batter into prepared pan and bake on middle rack of the oven for 20 to 25 minutes, until a toothpick or knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Cut into wedges and serve warm.

\* Ingredients may be ordered from Ramona Farms American Indian Foods, 520/418-0900 or [www.RamonaFarms.com](http://www.RamonaFarms.com).