

Laughing Planet Café introduces new Smart Beans™

After a grueling two-year process of testing and sampling, The Laughing Planet Café is pleased to announce the introduction of new “smart” pinto beans into its seven quick-service establishments in Oregon. These beans are grown in Washington using a “no-till” farming methods, and will replace beans grown conventionally and transported from the Midwest.

The process is a result of a collaboration between **Laughing Planet Café** www.laughingplanetcafe.com and **Truitt Brothers**, a Salem, Oregon food processor and industry-leading Food Alliance-certified operation. Also playing crucial roles was our primary vendor, **Food Services of America (FSA)** and the **Food Alliance**, a Portland Oregon-based certifier of sustainable practices.

These beans represent a significant leap forward for beankind and a vast improvement over conventional products. In particular, the use of locally grown beans reduces the need to transport them great distances, thus reducing significantly their “footprint”. Even more importantly, the beans are grown using “**no-till**” methods that conserve soil and reduce the need for fossil fuel-powered interventions.

“**No-till**” is a method of planting seeds directly in the rubble of previous crops, without having to till the soil and disrupt its crucial rhizosphere, the zone of living soil containing billions of organisms per square inch (fungi, bacteria, molds, etc.) that account for the soil’s productivity and, arguably, the nutritional outcome of plant foods grown in it. This practice actually builds healthy soil over time.

One of the most significant, if largely unnoticed, environmental catastrophes confronting us today is the ongoing loss of topsoil. Virtually all conventional farming, and even most organic farms use massive cultivators to turn the soil prior to and after planting. This process of tillage creates enormous problems by exposing the soil to wind and water erosion, and, as it is no longer bound together by a vibrant rhizosphere, it eventually dries up and blows away. The Great Dust Storms of the 30’s are an example of this.

No-till agriculture is one of the more important tools currently available to slow down this holocaust (the other is the development of perennial cultivars to replace annual grasses that are at the root of the problems caused by agriculture in general). Variations of no-till are being developed by **Central Bean**, www.centralbean.com a coop of farmers in central Washington.

Truitt Brothers, www.truittbros.com a processor and cannery in Salem Oregon, deserves the lion’s share of credit for helping us make this substitution. Their persistence, and visionary leadership in the sustainability community, helped fuel the process of working through a completely new supply for this crucial product on our menu.

Our primary foodservice vendor, **FSA**, www.fsafood.com has also been instrumental in developing these beans through their willingness to allocate warehouse space and time to the management of a new supply chain.

The **Food Alliance**, www.foodalliance.org a non-profit certifier of sustainable practices in the food industry, acted as an “incubator” for this project, and deserves kudos for broadening the definition of sustainability to include local living economies.

Thanks to all participants in this, and of course, thanks to our customers for your support and good humor and good appetite!

Don't you feel smarter already?