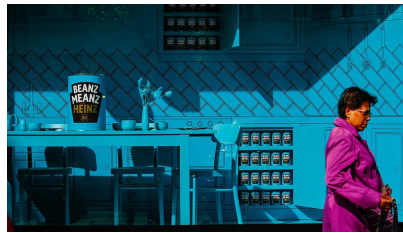


## Britain's obsession with baked beans



### Health trends and gourmet beans are driving demand for other varieties

WHEN Henry J. Heinz lugged five cases of tinned baked-bean samples to Fortnum & Mason, a luxury department store in London, in 1886, he cannot have imagined the impact he would have on British diets. Back then the American dish of haricot beans cooked with tomato sauce and pork (the meat was later dropped during wartime rationing) was a delicacy.

5 Britons today get through over 2m cans of the stuff a day—more than the rest of the world combined. Both Princess Diana and Queen Camilla have claimed it as a favourite meal. But this singular obsession has crowded out other forms of pulses, reckons Professor Eric Holub of Warwick University. “We’ve become canned in by that.”

10 Changing food trends mean that other types of bean are now getting a look in. In 2022 meat consumption in Britain was at its lowest level since records began in the 1970s; pulses are cheap, filling and healthy alternative sources of protein. Rising awareness of gut health is helping their case, too. Fewer than one in ten Britons get enough fibre, which is essential for digestion; beans are rich in it. Some local authorities have pledged to serve more beans in canteens at hospitals, schools, government buildings and prisons. Scientists from the University of Oxford have conducted trials of pulse-heavy menus at schools in Leicestershire.

15 These can also be seen as arguments for Britons to eat even more baked beans. But less-processed beans are healthier still, and more aspirational. Amelia Christie-Miller, the founder of Bold Bean Co, a British startup, says she wants to change the perception that beans are “dull, uninspiring and associated with poverty”. Her company sells supersize chickpeas and butter beans in sleek glass jars. They are marketed as the centrepiece of meals rather than a side—which helps justify the price. Sales are forecast to reach 2m units this year; that would  
20 be a tenfold increase on 2022, the year in which the firm made its supermarket debut.

Ms Christie-Miller is now working on her second cookbook. A number of other recipe volumes, published in September and October, increasingly extol pulses for their flavour, not just their function. Paul Newnham of Beans is How, a UN campaign to double global bean consumption by 2028, says that it helps to link pulses with heritage and identity. “It becomes about being proud of who I am, where I am from,” he says.

25 If beans really are about identity, Britain’s baked-bean juggernaut will be hard to stop. According to Kantar, a market-research firm, in the year to January 2024 beans were the only big canned-food categories to grow in sales volume. But baked beans grew by 1.7% whereas other types grew by only 0.2%. Many shoppers still don’t quite know what to do with canned pulses. But everyone knows how to eat baked beans, be it hot on toast or—if you’re weird—cold out of the can.

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