

US Dry Bean Council - Food Aid

US Dry Bean Council Food Aid Committee Principles

USDBC's Food Aid Committee promotes best practices for US food assistance programs of in-kind donations for the direct distribution or monetization (barter) of U.S. commodities. The US dry bean industry supports and promotes US dry beans in U.S. Department of Agriculture's McGovern Dole Food for Education Program (FFE) and Food for Progress Program (FFPr), and the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Food for Peace Program (FFP).

The U.S. dry bean industry is committed to assisting vulnerable populations around the world through the effective and efficient use of in-kind. USDBC understands that a fully functional food assistance program includes a range of feeding options—in-kind donations, cash, and the local/regional purchase of foods, each used where appropriate.

Beans are a favorite food of people throughout the world.

In many cultures, dry beans as a traditional food date back thousands of years. Beans are a staple for much of the world's population as a primary source of protein and other nutrients in South and Central America, Asia, the Indian sub-continent and Africa. Beans are central to many national recipes—*fiejoada* in Brazil, *Bandera Dominicana* in the Dominican Republic and "Gallo Pinto" in Nicaragua and Costa Rica as well as *Samp and Beans* in Southern Africa.

But beans are not just food. In many countries, beans are considered to be critical to national security. So much so that shortages or price increases for dry beans are commonly reported in the front pages of local newspapers. Beyond being just food, dry beans are often part of the culture and fabric of a country.

Beans are nutrition powerhouses.

Beans in a USAID Title II or Food for Education ration is a guarantee of improved nutrition. Many nutritionists refer to beans as a "superfood." And for good reason—beans are nutrient dense, rich in isoflavones, and an excellent source of dietary fiber. Diets rich in beans have been shown to help prevent cancer, heart disease and other common ailments. In addition, beans are rich in protease inhibitors.



The fiber in beans lowers cholesterol and plaque and help prevent blood sugar levels from rising too quickly eating, making beans a good choice for those who suffer from diabetes, insulin resistance or hypoglycemia.

Beans offer an excellent source of protein, particularly when combined with wheat, corn or rice. High in iron, beans can be used to address iron deficiency and anemia. They are one of the best sources of folate, B vitamins, and antioxidants, all essential for reproductive age women. Beans are higher in fiber than other grains, flours, and legumes available through US government food assistance programs. They are also a good source of potassium and low in sodium.

Beans are affordable and cost-competitive.

Selecting commodities for your program means weighing a number of factors: availability, host-country counterpart wishes, and local tastes. Costs may vary depending upon type of bean chosen, but regardless of the variety chosen beans are very competitive measured on a cost-per-serving basis.

Beans work well for direct feeding and development programs.

Beans have an illustrious history in Food for Work, Maternal Child Health programs, McGovern-Dole Global Food for Education programs, and other programs.



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Handling and storage of beans

Beans are typically packaged in 25 and 50 kg poly bags that are easy to handle and stack compared to other commodities. They are suitable to crowded storage conditions since they can be stacked relatively high without bursting or causing damage to the bags or the beans.

Shelf life

Beans have a minimum shelf life of one year and will keep indefinitely if stored in a cool, dry place. If stored properly, they can withstand relatively harsh conditions – even in tropical environments.

Substitutable ordering

USDA and USAID allow for substitutable ordering of beans. This means that tenders may include more than one class of beans, which maximizes budgets. Substitutable tendering also allows for cooperating sponsors to provide a greater variety of bean choices to recipients.



Whenever possible, we recommend that beans be requested when prices are lowest. Historically, this has been from the harvest season (mid-August to early October) through the end of the year. Garbanzo beans are harvested earlier, in June and July. As with other crops, pricing at any point in time is affected by a myriad of market forces. Please feel free to contact the USDBC for advice on the most suitable time period for ordering.

Bean varieties and local preference

It is imperative to know the dietary habits of local populations when developing food-aid rations. Not all varieties of beans are acceptable to all peoples, and the taste or cultural preferences governing acceptability are often regional as well as national. In this sense, beans are like wheat, rice, corn and other commodities which also have local preferences.

There are so many varieties of U.S. dry beans produced that national and local preferences can usually be met through careful specification of an appropriate variety. Not only do beans come in many shapes, sizes,



textures and colors but the different varieties often also taste very different. Some varieties share enough characteristics that they can often be substituted for one another, making acceptability of an unknown variety much more palatable than is the case with other commodities. Colored varieties of beans can often be substituted for each other easily. For example, light and dark red kidney beans, pinto and cranberry beans, and pink and small red beans. Likewise, some varieties of white beans can be substituted when there is not a strong cultural preference for a particular size white bean.

For more information

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