

Pulses and Legumes

(whole or minimally processed)

Legumes, pulses, and beans are high-quality protein sources, full of fibre and polyphenols, nutritious, climate-friendly and can be grown in many places.

However, compared to many other countries in the world, Europeans eat fewer pulses and consumption has decreased over the last few decades. The UN designated February 10 as World Pulses Day to bring attention to these foods and encourage more awareness and consumption.

The most popular pulse types in Europe are lentils, kidney beans, and chickpeas, and are typically consumed at home and purchased in dried or canned form.

Relatively uncommon pulse types (among them bambara beans, pigeon peas, mung beans, and lupines) are typically consumed in a restaurant or on the go, often in processed, sprouted, or fermented form.

The market is not saturated and there is room for growth. While legumes are increasingly recognised as viable alternatives to animal-based protein, historical perceptions of “poor man’s meat” still linger, influencing consumer acceptance and usage patterns.



Large differences in consumption per country:

- France, Spain and the UK encompassed 60% of the total consumption in Europe. In France, more than 53% of consumers eat pulses twice a week or more, while in Germany, this is only 22% (2021)
- According to the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, Danes eat about 2 grams of pulses a day. This accounts for only 2% of the 100 grams recommended by the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration.
- As different nationalities become more integrated, European consumers are increasingly encountering bean dishes from other cultures, (such as the Middle East and Northern Africa). Ethnic communities and traditional local cuisines can influence the consumption of legumes.





Health, simplicity, and affordability are main motivations to eat legumes, while taste lags behind:

- Health considerations, including the nutritional value of legumes as sources of fiber and protein, are key drivers of adoption. Most consumers associate legumes with being healthy and natural. Furthermore, pulses are generally seen as versatile and filling.
- Convenience and affordability play significant roles, especially among consumers seeking simpler cooking options and cost-effective protein sources.
- Taste preferences: while legumes are not perceived as particularly tasty, when they are incorporated into flavourful dishes this can serve as motivators for consumption.

Legumes are intertwined with traditional diets:

- Consumers who follow traditional diets are more likely to consume legumes. However, innovation in recipes and convenience, and the introduction of 'exotic' types of legumes is slowly bringing these plant-based protein sources onto the plates of trend followers as well.
- Consumers who more often incorporate legumes in their diets are more likely to use them as meal replacements than those who eat them sparsely.
- People who shop at the market or "specialised stores" are more likely to opt for legumes in their diet.

Legumes have a reputation of being a 'poor man's food':

- Legumes do not always fit with consumer perception of fresh and attractive food. Taste perception of beans vary, and it is generally not perceived as an indulgent or luxurious food.
- Not knowing how to prepare legumes is a barrier to making tasty meals.
- Concerns regarding digestive discomfort, such as flatulence and bowel issues, present a barrier, particularly among women.

Strategies for increasing demand:

- Education campaigns aimed at dispelling myths and overcoming stereotypes about legumes, such as the perception of pulses being outdated, as well as tips on reducing pulse-related flatulence (e.g. incorporating them gradually and consistently into diet).
- Collaborations with chefs, culinary experts, and food influencers can elevate the appeal of legumes by introducing innovative cooking techniques and flavour profiles. Furthermore, incorporating pulses into convenient ready-made dishes such as salads, soups, bakery goods and snacks.
- Consumers do not necessarily know what legumes or pulses are, when referred to as a category. So it is important to refer to the specific legume: chickpeas, green peas, lentils, soybeans.
- Framing legume consumption particularly within the context of health can enhance consumer perception and adoption.

Extra resources:

[The European market potential for common dry beans](#)

[What the heck are pulses? European unawareness stands in the way of this "green" superfood](#)

[Future of sustainable eating? Examining the potential for expanding bean eating in a meat-eating culture](#)

[Pulses for Sustainability: Breaking Agriculture and Food Sectors Out of Lock-In](#)

[Just a little bit more legumes!](#)

[Nutritional significance, value-added applications, and consumer perceptions of food legumes: A review](#)