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MONTANA'S LEADING

LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

LENTIL HEAVEN

by CHEF JIM GRAY

Don't faint, but I'm going to quote from a Bible story and give you a vegan recipe.

Open your texts to Genesis to the story of the brothers, Jacob and Esau, the latter being the eldest and therefore entitled to the "birthright" — meaning that when his father died, he (Esau) would inherit patriarchal status. But young Jacob wanted the birthright and so he somehow convinced Esau to trade it for a bowl of lentils.

Esau must have been one hungry dude.

Now for the vegan part: I am not a fan. Vegetarian I can deal with. I do eat my veggies (most of them, anyway), but I am a committed meat-eater, so when someone suggests that I try to go meatless for a meal — or worse yet — a day, I'm not so enthusiastic.


But I am well aware of food trends.

Meatless Mondays began as a movement among the food cognoscenti in many large U.S. cities about two years ago and it's a food trend that has caught on, making its way through our food-centric culture.

I cannot identify the precise moment when I decided to give it a try, but it wasn't long after I tasted a chef-colleague's version of a lentil stew that it occurred to me that every once in a while, I could do something like this.

So I set out to create a dish where meat was a co-star and not necessarily the center of attention. I have a chili recipe that calls for a pound of ground beef and so I wanted to see if I could substitute — ounce-for-ounce — lentils for beef. To my surprise and satisfaction, it worked.

I like my chili spicy and this recipe calls for hot Mexican-style chili powder, which also contains cumin and other dried herbs. But because I like flavorful heat, sometimes I'll even add up to four whole chipotle peppers, lending their smoky taste to my chili (I remove the chipotles before finishing the dish).

Please note, too, that as a devotee of Texas-style chili, I do not use beans. However, since this is truly a vegetarian dish and, shudder, a vegan one, too, you could add any style beans you wanted. 

LENTIL CHILI

7-3/4 cups vegetable broth, divided use
1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and diced fine
1 medium yellow onion, cut into fine dice
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 Tbsp Mexican chili powder (spicy or mild)
16 oz. brown lentils
1 28-oz can diced tomatoes with juice
2/3 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

In a soup pot or Dutch oven, heat 3/4 cup vegetable broth. Add diced red bell pepper, minced garlic and yellow onion and cook over medium heat until the vegetables have softened.

Add the chili powder, the remainder (7 cups) of vegetable broth and the lentils. Bring the liquid to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook, covered, for about 30 minutes or until the lentils have softened.

Add the chopped tomatoes and juice to the pot and continue cooking for about 10 minutes.

Stir in chopped cilantro before serving.



Find other recipes from
Chef Jim Gray:

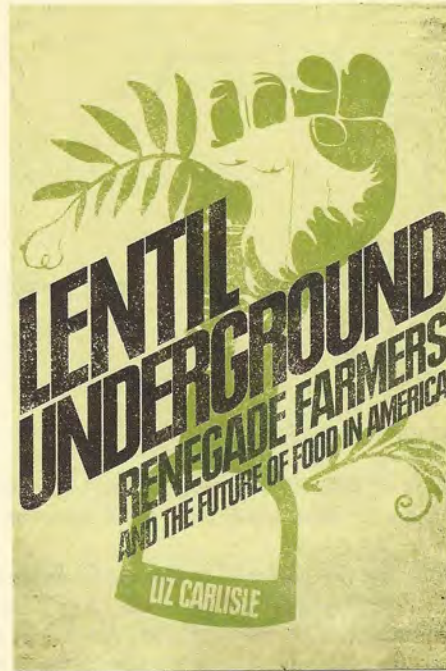
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THE LENTIL UNDERGROUND

by CLAUDIA GALOFRE KREVAT

A staple of world cuisines since the dawn of agriculture, pulse crops such as beans, lentils, and chickpeas, are high in heart-healthy proteins and have a low glycemic spike. Not only does a half-cup serving provide 45% of daily recommended folate, a third of our daily recommended intake of fiber, and half the potassium of a banana, lentils also contain 56% more antioxidant capacity than blueberries! But what we also learn from the farmers at Timeless Food, pulse crops were the original form of fertilizers, replenishing the nitrogen used by staple grains like wheat and corn. If we go back to ancient civilizations we can trace how these civilizations like the Egyptians and the Mayans, paired pulses with grains, carbohydrates with proteins, connecting the dots between our own health and that of the planet.

Timeless Food was created in the late 1980's when a group of farmers from Montana's Golden Triangle — David Oien, Bud Barta, Jim Barngrover, and Tom Hastings — said "no" to agri-business and came together to grow a self-reseeding leguminous cover crop developed by Montana State University's Dr. Jim Sims. Persistent as they were, the Timeless group, who were also among the first organic farmers in Montana, remained committed



to the ancient way of using pulse crops, crop rotation, and natural fertilizers as a way of alternative agriculture, eliminating the toxic chemical fertilizers used by others.

Today, Montana ranks as the #1 producer of organic and non-organic lentils, and the renegade farmers from Timeless Food are responsible for growing a large percentage of the organic pulses and ancient grains in the state. More farmers have joined the original group using biologically diverse farm systems. This "lentil underground" has grown into a million dollar enterprise that sells to hundreds of independent food stores and a host of renowned restaurants.

On February 22, 2015, Montana-born author, Dr. Liz Carlisle, a protégé of Michael Pollan and fellow at the Center of Diversified Farming Systems at UC-Berkeley, debuted the remarkable story of these four unheralded farmers who defied corporate agribusiness and launched a sustainable food movement in her book, *Lentil Underground*.

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