

Your HUMMUS HABIT **COULD BE GOOD** FOR THE EARTH



AP Photo/Anna Meyer

By **WHITNEY PIPKIN**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

PORTLAND — Hummus is having a heyday with American consumers, and that could be as good for the soil as it is for our health.

Formerly relegated to the snack aisle in U.S. grocery stores, the chickpea-based dip has long starred as the smooth centerpiece of Middle Eastern meals and, increasingly, plant-based diets. Occasionally, it even doubles as dessert. Last year, Americans spent four times as much money on grocery-store hummus as they did a decade before, according to the latest consumer surveys, and a growing number of snacks and fast-casual concepts also feature the fiber- and protein-rich chickpea as their pièce de résistance.

Part of a subcategory of legumes called pulses, chickpeas — along with lentils, dry peas and several varieties of beans — have been a critical crop and foodstuff for centuries in Middle Eastern and Asian countries. The crops are so promising that the United Nations deemed 2016 the “Year of Pulses” to expand interest in these ancient foods and their potential to help solve dueling modern-day conundrums: hunger and soil depreciation.

Some American farmers were already well on their way to embracing pulses, seeing the role they could play in improving soil health and setting the stage for better harvests of

cash crops like wheat. Last year, U.S. farmers planted more chickpeas than ever to satisfy the growing demand for plant-based protein alternatives — which, in turn, could help restore soils depleted by decades of intensive farming.

Unlike corn or wheat, these pulses fix their own nitrogen from the atmosphere, leaving extra stores of the nutrient in the soil for future crops to consume. For this reason, pulses can play a vital role in crop rotations, especially those that don’t rely on chemical fertilizers. What’s more, if managed well, these crops can be part of a farming system that sequesters carbon from the atmosphere and helps mitigate climate change.

“I see this diversification and these legumes as a way to get away from the use of synthetic nitrogen,” says Casey Bailey, a farmer in Fort Benton, Montana, who grows organic chickpeas as the lynchpin of a rotational planting program. “They’re a tricky crop to grow, but I’m a huge proponent of trying to figure out how to do it.”

He sells about 2,000 pounds of chickpeas each month to Little Sesame, a fast-casual concept serving hummus bowls topped with seasonal vegetables at a pair of locations in Washington, D.C. Chef-owners Nick Wiseman and Israeli-born Ronen Tenne soak the dried chickpeas for hours before cooking and blending them (with tahini, garlic, olive oil and lemon juice) into daily batches to satiate the city’s lunch and after-work

crowds — often without adding meat.

“We don’t say it much, but 80% of the menu is always vegan,” says Wiseman. “It’s awesome to see people who would probably eat meat every day come in here and be satisfied without it.”

For Wiseman, the cherry on top of opening a second location this year is getting to buy more kabuli chickpeas from Bailey, whom

peas a dozen years ago, after a retailer looking to sell more of the healthful legumes reached out to him on LinkedIn, making him a pioneer in Montana’s grain-heavy Golden Triangle region. But the word was spreading that the chickpea could pull in more money per pound than other legumes while reducing the need for chemical inputs compared to crops like wheat.

High in fiber and protein, chickpeas are playing a starring role on menus at fast-casual restaurant chains, where hummus bowls abound. Chickpeas are also good for soil health — and growing demand could help restore soils depleted by decades of intensive farming.

he’ll visit this summer during a road trip in Little Sesame’s 1978 Volkswagen van. Creating markets for such legumes — particularly those grown without chemicals such as desiccants used to dry chickpeas in the fields — is a growing interest for Wiseman.

“These [chickpeas] are helping restore the grasslands of the West, which are this huge carbon sink,” Wiseman says over a bowl of hummus topped with snap peas and Aleppo chili oil at his Chinatown location. “They’re a very powerful plant.”

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peas a dozen years ago, after a retailer looking to sell more of the healthful legumes reached out to him on LinkedIn, making him a pioneer in Montana’s grain-heavy Golden Triangle region. But the word was spreading that the chickpea could pull in more money per pound than other legumes while reducing the need for chemical inputs compared to crops like wheat.

When Tim McGreevy started working in 1994 as the CEO of the USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council and the American Pulse Association — a trade group that trumpets the power of chickpeas, lentils, dry peas and beans — the country was harvesting about 30,000 acres of chickpeas annually, primarily in the hilly Palouse agricultural region of Washington, Idaho and Oregon. By last year, that number had swelled to 859,000 acres.

“That’s a pretty big difference in 25 years,” says McGreevy, who also grows chickpeas on a small farm in Eastern Washington.

Last year, in particular, Bailey says, “it seemed like the entire state of Montana was chickpeas.”

While about half of the country’s chickpea harvest is still shipped overseas, a growing number of chickpeas are going to domestic markets as demand increases. Trade disputes also are making international markets less reliable. In 2019, U.S. farmers reduced for the first time in years the number of acres they planned to plant in chickpeas, down to 519,000 acres. Volatile trade riffs with countries, such as India in 2018, left much of that year’s harvest sitting in silos, where an oversupply has continued to depress chickpea prices this year.

“The saving grace — and why I’m still optimistic — is the domestic market continues to grow for all pulse crops,” says McGreevy. He thinks the lower price could also spur even more innovation of chickpea-based foods. “Chickpeas have, in particular, shown significant growth in sales over the past decade.”

Americans spent nearly \$800 million on hummus from retail stores in 2018, McGreevy says. That’s compared with just under \$200 million in hummus sales a decade before and only \$5 million in the mid-1990s, placing the popular dip among food retail’s fastest-growing sectors.

Sabra Dipping Co., an Israeli company that’s been partnered with PepsiCo since 2008, has led hummus’ parade into U.S. markets over the past decade and is still one of the sector’s

largest players. A Sabra production plant in Chesterfield County, Virginia, where the company also has encouraged more farmers to grow chickpeas, was expanded in 2014 to produce more than 8,000 tons of hummus a month in anticipation of market growth.

The chickpea invasion has gone beyond the dip aisle, too, with crunchy roasted versions from companies like Hippeas and The Good Bean competing with potato chips as a healthful alternative. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines suggest Americans eat 1½ cups of cooked pulses per week, McGreevy notes. High in protein, dietary fiber and essential amino acids, pulses can play an even larger role in diets focused on reducing meat consumption.

Hummus already looms large on American snack tables, replacing ranch dressing as a healthier, cut-vegetable accompaniment. And, now, it’s staging a takeover of the main meal, too. Hummus-based bowls are the centerpiece of chains like New York City’s The Hummus & Pita Co. and a staple ingredient at the ballooning number of fast-casual Mediterranean concepts, such as Cava and Roti. Chickpeas are cropping up on menus in Asian noodle dishes, French fries, soft-serve “ice cream” and dessert-like frostings.

But perhaps the easiest way to wade into the chickpea fray is to find a really good bowl of hummus — which doubles as the Arabic word for chickpea — and shovel it in.

High hopes for your next vacation: Cannabis tourism grows

By **SUSAN G. HAUSER** *New York Times News Service*

PORTLAND — Sam Rosenbaum has Stephen Colbert to thank for his career switch from accountant to cannabis tour operator. The newly minted MBA was watching an episode of “The Colbert Report” in 2014 when the comedian spoke of a “cannabis green rush” coming to Colorado, which had recently become the first state to legalize recreational marijuana.

“The part about bus tours kind of jumped out at me,” Rosenbaum, 34, said. “I came up with High 5 Tours and registered it the next week.” It was a prescient move. One year later, when Rosenbaum’s home state of Oregon voted to legalize cannabis, High 5 Tours was the state’s first cannabis bus tour.

Rosenbaum is not alone in his attempts in growing the world of cannabis tourism.

Eleven states so far have voted to allow people 21 and older to buy regulated amounts of cannabis product for consumption on private property. Sales systems are not yet in place in Michigan and Maine, and in Mas-

sachusetts a gradual licensing of dispensaries began in November. In Vermont, as in Washington, D.C., possession, growing and sharing cannabis are legal, but not buying or selling.

But in six other states (Alaska, California, Colorado, Nevada, Oregon and Washington), business is booming at cannabis dispensaries and related businesses.

As for cannabis tourism, it is totally hot in Colorado and California and emerging in others. Travel entrepreneurs like Rosenbaum are organizing marijuana-infused experiences, including painting classes, bus tours and food classes.

In the Mile High City

The pioneers of cannabis tourism, Colorado Cannabis Tours and My 420 Tours, are in Denver.

The Original Colorado Cannabis Tour includes visits to two dispensaries, after which onboard consumption of purchases is encouraged. Visits to a growing facility and a glass-pipe blowing demonstration round out the \$89 bus tour, which lasts precisely four hours and 20 minutes.

Colorado Cannabis Tours is also behind the Puff, Pass



AP Photo/Richard Vogel

Tourists share cannabis cigarettes during a tour on the Green Line Bus in Los Angeles.

& Paint class. Mike Eymmer, the company’s chief executive, teamed up with artist Heidi Keyes to create the first class in 2015. For \$49, the tour includes teacher guidance and art supplies, including a canvas to take home. Cannabis is BYOC. The concept has since spread to other states.

“There are really some amazing paintings that come out of it,” Keyes said. “With smoking, you’re able to concentrate better. The colors are more vibrant and people are more willing to think outside the box.”

My 420 Tours offers the Blaze & Gaze Graffiti Walking Tour (\$29), a post-consumption 2½-mile walking tour of Denver’s RiNo

Art District, and the Sushi & Joint Rolling Class (\$79). “It’s our plan to copy and paste this model across the country,” said Danny Schaefer, the chief executive of My 420 Tours.

Heavy on the regulations

California has also rolled out the green carpet for tourists. West Coast Cannabis Tours, in San Diego, offers various tours and classes, including an exclusive tour of a 32,000-square-foot growing facility (\$99). Todd Green, who started the company when only medical marijuana was legal, said, “Now that it’s recreational, people are coming out of the woodwork.”

But regulations abound, especially for bus tours. In Colorado, Oregon and California, passengers on tour buses are allowed to consume what they have just purchased at cannabis dispensaries, which is almost every tour’s first stop. However, in Washington and Nevada, laws prohibiting smoking in moving vehicles limit operators to tours that are strictly educational. Seattle Kush Tours, for example, offers a 3½-hour tour for \$99 that informs passengers about the new industry through stops at a dispensary, a growing site and a glass-pipe blowing demonstration. State law also prohibits the use of cannabis in a Seattle cannabis cooking class. Hemp is the substitute.

In Las Vegas, Matthew Miner, chief executive of Herbology Tours, offers for \$109 a daily 3-hour Herbology 101 tour. Well-informed guides share literature and knowledge during stops at a dispensary, a kitchen where cannabis edibles are made, and even a cannabis art museum, Cannabition, which it says features the world’s largest bong. “It’s a really cool experience, within limitations, because we can’t smoke at any lounges ... yet,” he says.

West Hollywood, as well as some cities in the San Francisco Bay Area, has circumvented state restrictions by allowing cannabis social clubs or consumption lounges. Alaska will soon be the first state permitting consumption lounges attached to dispensaries. And in late May, Colorado’s governor signed a bill allowing cannabis “hospitality spaces” at dispensaries and at BYOC clubs.

The lack of smoking lounges has been a frustrating issue for Mitchell Knottingham, who owns Juneau Cannabis Tours in Alaska but has yet to launch his first tour. Knottingham said he got involved in things early in order to be ready when lounge approval came around. That may happen as early as mid-July.

And in Portland, Rosenbaum’s bright yellow High Five Tours bus takes off every day at 6 p.m. on a dispensary tour (\$79) that includes stops at food carts and a brewery. Every Friday, following the tour of the Columbia River Gorge (\$89), he treats his passengers to ice cream sandwiches. It’s been more than two years since he worked as an accountant. He hasn’t looked back.