



#220, 5906 - 50 Street, Leduc, Alberta T9E 0R6  
Telephone: (780) 986-9398  
Fax: (780) 980-2570  
email: [office@pulse.ab.ca](mailto:office@pulse.ab.ca) website: [www.pulse.ab.ca](http://www.pulse.ab.ca)

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## **Healthy crop, healthy food and healthy Albertans**

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Imagine a crop that is healthy for you and the environment. Does this sound too good to be true? Pulse crops, including dry peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas, offer an excellent nutritional profile and have been linked to prevention of chronic health conditions facing Canadians such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. Pulses are also an environmentally friendly source of protein as they require little or no nitrogen fertilizer, limiting greenhouse gas emissions associated with their production.

Not traditionally a staple among Canadian consumers, the challenge for Alberta researchers is incorporating pulses into foods that Canadians already enjoy.

With support from the Canadian pulse industry, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development scientists from the Food Processing Division have set out to determine how pulse ingredients can be added to a variety of foods. Pulse flours or fractions (protein, starch and fibre) have been added to snack foods, gluten-free crackers, burgers, low-fat bologna and breakfast sausages, and used to formulate a meat substitute. The researchers are also investigating how to shorten pulse cooking times by developing a quick cooking process that maintains their nutritional and health benefits. This development work is helping set the direction of further study of pulse ingredients and how they can be used to create high quality foods.

Pulses in their whole form or as a fraction can add value to Canadian food products. They can be used to boost the protein or fibre content of foods or decrease the fat and caloric content.

Pulses have an added advantage: they are gluten free and can be used in formulations to create foods for Canadians with celiac disease. Jerry Bigam of Kinnikinnick Foods of Edmonton notes "pulse ingredients are crucial for creating high quality gluten-free products. Pea flour or starch, pea protein and fibre are used in many Kinnikinnick products such as breads, buns, waffles, cookies and mixes."

Research demonstrating new uses for pulse ingredients will create additional opportunities for pulse processing in Canada, generating greater added value for Canadian agricultural goods and creating jobs. It will also lead to the development of nutritious food products, providing Canadians with healthier dietary options.

The Alberta Pulse Growers Commission represents 4,500 growers of dry peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas. Their vision is to have Alberta pulses recognized by consumers as environmentally friendly, healthy, nutritious, and recognized by all producers as being an essential element in a sustainable cropping system.

The Food Processing Division provides research, development, and commercialization facilities to agri-food processing companies for a wide range of food products to encourage the growth and expansion of value-added agricultural processing. Their Centres, which operate out of Leduc, Edmonton, and Brooks, are staffed with experienced food scientists, engineers and technologists. The services provided are designed to strengthen and expand the capability of Alberta's food processors to meet the challenges of the marketplace through application of new technology and the development of new or improved products and processes.

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For more information, contact:

Karen Erin  
Senior Manager, Branch Head of Programs  
Food Processing Development Centre  
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development  
780-980-4864

**Government  
of Alberta** ■

For information and photos contact:

Wendy Benson, RD, MPH  
Nutrition Consultant  
Alberta Pulse Growers:  
403-275-5330

