



Bean Box Goods
January 2026

“Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.”

-Robin Wall Kimmerer

The new year is here and is reminding us right out of the gate what a pivotal time we live in, with some things trending auspicious, and others looming ominous. We just wrapped up our fifth year of offering this subscription. The Bean Box was one of several Covid Era pivots for us, as we tried new things in light of many of our regular wholesale customers evaporating overnight back in 2020. That was our 10th year in business. Fifteen years in, the world keeps turning, changing, keeping us on our toes.

One the things I cherish about beans is that most every culture has *their* beans. They are such an integral part of cuisine and what it means to be human beans, from the cowpeas of Gullah Geechie and the Carolina Rice Kitchen cuisine, to the countless lentils of India; the ayocote of Oaxaca to the Skunk Beans of the Wabanaki. While the assorted species of beans each have their ancestral lands, they have an incredible capacity to make themselves at home in vastly different climes over time. The ‘common beans’ (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) of ancient Peru have become inseparable components of cuisine all over the world, just as rice varieties with ancient origins in Asia have traversed across time and space to become the staple food of over half the world.

Where we are in the Northeast, there is a long tradition of ‘bean-in-hole’. I’ve been to several of these events and they not only make for a *very* good pot of beans, but inspire a little extra awe in those who gather to watch the insulative crust of earth, glowing coals, and ash-laden cast iron pot reveal an aromatic stew of peak savory satiation.

I’m conspiring to start an annual bean-in-hole event at our farm this year and have been researching the long history of this dish off and on. I came across this article on Maine logging camps by [Atlas Obscura](#) that is worth a read. These quotes in particular stood out to me:

In the bare-bones camps where everyone was housed in one long log cabin, “Only one daily function, besides the outhouse, warranted its own structure, and that was the lean-to protecting the bean hole.”

And regardless of loggers’ food preferences, “they all ate strikingly similar weights of baked beans each day, from a pound to a pound and a half, furnishing from 10 to 16 percent of their 6,000 to 8,000 daily calories and one-fifth to one-third of their protein intake.”

Have you eaten your pound of beans today?! This box should last you about a week if you should find yourself in a Maine logging camp this winter. To aid you on your quest, here’s a repeat link to a worthy [primer on cooking with beans](#).

And as a reminder, you can view our recommendations for cooking with beans on our website here:
<https://www.vermontbeancrafters.com/dry-beans>

If you’ve found any great such resources (printed or digital) please feel free to share them with me at joe@vermontbeancrafters.com

In this Box

Organic **Marafax**, Morningstar Farm, VT
Navy Beans, Callan Farms, NY

Organic **Tigers Eye**, Bean Story, CA
Black Eyed Peas, Marsh Hen Mill, SC
Organic **Black Beluga** Lentils, Timeless Foods, MT
Organic **Rojo Chiquito** Red Beans, Martens Farm, NY

Organic Marafax Beans (P. Vulgaris)



We had a surge in orders for Bean Boxes this winter and we ended up running out of marafax beans towards the very end. There was a handful of recipients who were sent our new offering of Old Indian Woman beans, which are distinct but similar, and will perform well in any recipe you would put marafax beans in.

here is a debate, unlikely to be resolved soon, over which beans make the best baked beans. The alliances can be generalized, with plenty of exceptions, as such:

- Navy beans for Boston Baked Beans
- Soldier beans with maple rather than molasses in VT
- Yellow Eye is an overall favorite in Maine generally, and most often found in Bean-in-Hole bakes. It comes in at least two varieties: Steuben and Keneally
- Jacob's Cattle is one of the older heirloom varieties and is most likely a Wabanaki variety that would be found in the original bean-in-hole suppers, prepared with bear fat and maple rather than the pork and molasses settler colonialists brought to the area.
- Marafax beans are asserted to be the top choice for Mainers living in the blueberry lands Northeast of Ellsworth. These are my favorite for baked beans too. These marafax were grown in Vermont by the Johnson family. They grow over 10 acres of heirloom beans in a crop rotation with grains and cover crops through the 80 acres they manage.

Erin French of the Lost Kitchen in Maine put out a recipe that involved them and there ended being a nation-wide shortage of them as folks from all over scrambled to try them out. That experience was a poignant reminder of our precious some of these heirlooms are in both their meaning in specific cuisines, and the precarious of their limited availability.

The recipe I'm sharing is one I've adapted after assessing a dozen or so other ones from around New England over the years. I use smoked paprika and Applewood smoked sea salt to bring in those smoky savory notes that smoked pork usually does in other

recipes. You do you, but for me the pork is a bit much in an already dense and filling dish. These simple spices still imbue that smoky note amidst the sweet, the salty, and the tangy layers of flavor.

Baked Beans – 1 hour stovetop, 2 – 8 hours in oven

With 1 lb dry Marafax beans this yields 8 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 lb dry Marafax Beans (2 lbs cooked weight)
- 1.5 quarts of cooking water
- 1 medium to large yellow onion, diced
- 1/4 c maple syrup (double if you like 'em sweet)
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon Applewood smoked sea salt
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1/2 inch fresh-grated ginger
- 1/2 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 tablespoon white pepper
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar (after beans are soft)

Soak your beans ahead of time. Drain, top with fresh water and bring to a boil at medium heat inside a dutch oven. Once brought to a boil, reduce heat to med-low, keep a lid atop the pot, slightly ajar, and stir in all of your other ingredients, save for the vinegar. Warm your oven up to 300F.

Once your beans are beginning to soften and the skins peel off when removed from the cooking liquid, take a bean and taste it to make sure it's not chalky. If it's all set, you can stir in your apple cider vinegar. Make sure you have about 1/2" of water column above your beans, and transfer the dutch oven to the oven with the lid on.

Some recipes call for 2 hours in the oven, some for as much as 8 hours. And others for every point in between. The big idea is the longer they sit in the oven, the thicker and more cohesive the result will be. The sugars will have more time to interact with the amino acids present and caramelize by way of the Maillard reaction.

So you ultimately could skip the oven step if you are in a rush. They will be good even then. But if you want them to be great, put them in the oven for at least a couple of hours, and up to eight hours. Be sure to check in on them every hour or so to make sure they have enough liquid in there to keep them from drying out.

This meal is after all just a modern interpretation of bean-in-hole preparations, which passively cooked the beans 12 to 24 hours in a bed of coals, covered and insulated by a few feet of earth

Organic Navy Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



Navy beans likely get their current namesake from the fact that they are standard faire in the US Navy, being served in their mess halls since the 1800's. And while most of us would like to not think about the Senate, I think there is likely bipartisan agreement on this [Senate Bean Soup](#) which has apparently been served daily on Capitol Hill for over 110 years. I sub one teaspoon each of smoked paprika, kombu and smoked salt when wanting to skip the ham.

These beans, like all beans, offer a low-glycemic source of carbs that is particularly well-suited for anyone with diabetes, but useful for anyone who wants a sustained, slow-release form of energy throughout their day. A food is considered low-glycemic if they fall below 55 of the index, which runs up to 100. Navy beans tend to fall in the 30-36 range, well into low-glycemic territory.

There has been research linking navy to improvements in metabolic disorders, lowering cholesterol, decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. There is [further research](#) connecting folate in one's diet with decreased risk for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia due to this B vitamin's positive impacts on homocysteine in the bloodstream.

Suffice to say there's a lot of health-oriented reasons to eat beans. But let's not forget they're also delicious. They are standard in the Boston version of baked beans, and great in any soup, like this [Pureed White Bean and Winter Squash soup](#) from Martha Rose Shulman. And, lest we forget, navy beans are the go-to bean for this dessert with deep ties to the Civil Rights Movement: [bean pie!](#)

Organic Tiger Eye Beans (*P. Vulgaris*)



These striking beans are another gift to the world from the region currently known as Peru. They are truly beautiful and I've seen the eyes of children and adults alike light up when they see them. Something about them makes folks want to hold them, run their fingers through them, keep a few in their pocket for good luck.

These are also referred to as Pepa de Zapallo, which is a little confusing, as that translates to pumpkin seed, but I imagine that is in reference to their orange hues. Like many beans, the intense colors of these beans when dry blanches out a bit when cooked, but the stripes remain discernible.

Being so visually striking, I recommend giving these beans a simple treatment. Starting with sofrito or mire poix in a pot, and then adding your water (or stock) in the standard 2:1 ratio of water to beans once the vegetables have begun to brown and become aromatic should be all you need.

Here's a more in-depth step-by-step recipe from [Naznin Aktar](#). Don't be shy about sharing with us what you do with your beans, either through an emailed note or else tagging us on Instagram.

Black Eyed Peas (*Vigna angularis*)



Most everyone seems to know of Black Eyed Peas, but not too many people up here in the Northeast seem to have had the pleasure of eating them. Or if they have, they don't constitute a regular part of their diet. No one is commercially growing them in the Northeast at present as they are more heat-loving bean being. There aren't too many farm-direct sources we could find, but we were able to track down some B.E.P.s from Marsh Hen Mill, a diversified farm on Editso Island that specializes in grains and peas.

As you may well know, they make for incredible eating, and are a staple in Southern cuisine. Preparing Hoppin' John for New Years to bring good fortune is perhaps their most famous application. Here is a [video recipe](#) for a simple, delicious BEP-based stew that would be good any day of the year from Wanjiru Jane.

Of note, these are not another common bean (*P. Vulgaris*) with roots in South America. These are *V. unguiculata* and trace their roots to Western Africa. Their presence in southern cuisine is one more complicated legacy from the nefarious transatlantic movement of enslaved humans.

You could choose to hold on to these and make some Hoppin' John for next New Years or belatedly court fortune and make it today! There are many versions of this recipe, some being as simple as 1 lb bacon + 1 pint peas + 1 pint rice. I'm not authority on southern cooking, but appreciated [the deep dive Serious Eats did on Hoppin John here](#). And for the visually-inclined, [here is a video how-to](#) recently put out by Georgia Cooking for Soul that gets you there too.

If you wanted a less well-trodden path for your peas, try this cowpea [ceviche](#) recipe from Global Bean. And while you're on their website, consider subscribing to their newsletter and reading all the articles they have on beany happenings from all over the world.

Black Beluga Lentils (*Lens Culinaris*)



These Black Beluga Lentils in particular helped to put Timeless Foods on the map. I can't hype up the farmers of Timeless Foods enough. They are featured in the [Lentil Underground](#), and have spent the last couple decades revolutionizing agriculture in parts of Montana that had been large monocrops of chemically-managed conventional wheat for much of the 20th century.

When cooked, these Black Beluga Lentils hold their color and their shape extremely well, glistening like caviar. They're good in any context that lentils are at home, but they hold their shape better than brown, puy, and red lentils, so you might as well save them for recipes where you can show them off, even if just lightly salted and served over the Freekah included in this Box.

Once they have reached their creamy, starchy perfection, spoon onto bowls of rice or atop some pita, crusty bread, or crunchy romaine leaves. Adorn with a glug of olive oil, fresh lime juice and cilantro (or flat-leaf parsley if you don't do cilantro).

It's very worth your while to add [raita](#) to your repertoire if it's not already. It's simple, refreshing, and adds a vibrant, tangy, fatty layer to any meal. One part rice, one part lentils, one part raita make a meal worth having on a regular basis.

I've shared this before, but here is a great short piece by [Dan of Cooks Illustrated](#) into the why rice and lentils are such a nutritious and delicious pairing. Hint: the essential amino acids of tryptophan and lysine are at play. The video linked to above is worth a watch.

And to wrap up, here's an easy to navigate deep dive into black lentils and how to cook them from [Our Salty Kitchen](#). They really do require a different treatment from other lentils.

Rojo Chiquito Red Beans (P. Vulgaris)



Rojo Chiquito is a recent addition to the class of beans simply known as 'small red beans'. Breeders from Michigan and Washington state teamed up to make a disease-resistant bean with an up-right growing habit that would be better for northern US soils than many of the other small red beans, that are more typically grown in more southern climates and soils. These beans are also about 1/3 smaller on average than other small red beans in their class, and hold their shape and texture well, while making a richly flavored and hued stock. They are going to be a winner in any chili you make this summer or in the cool Autumn months just around the bend.

These were grown by Hanna and Peter Martens who are the generation following in the iconic footsteps of Mary Howell and Klaus Martens of Lakeview Organic Grains in Penn Yan NY. They grow an impressive variety of legumes and grains interspersed with cover crops and have a world class seed cleaning operation that gets utilized by other farms in the region.

Their family has been at the crest of the wave of organic grains and cover cropping for over thirty years now, and with recent investments they've made they are set up to be one of the cornerstones of organic agriculture in the Northeast for another thirty years at least.

For some recipe ideation: here is an Instant Pot-centered [Barbacoa and Rojo Chiquito Bean recipe](#) shared by India Tree. And if you would like another idea beyond putting these in a chili, this [Red Beans and Rice](#) by Adam Ragusea.