Zursun Idaho Heirloom Beans Bean Growing Practices Notes Update: December,16th, 2016

Thank you for your interest in our products. My companies Zursun Idaho Heirloom Beans and Soranco Bean Products Inc. do not actually "grow" or maintain farms to produce the beans we process, package and distribute. However, we do work directly and personally with many farmers who grow and produce these specifically for us. We receive their beans in the fall in a raw state and we perform the cleaning, milling and sorting to get them into the best possible condition for sale to the public.

We handle some seeds used to produce some varieties. Some varieties are grown in other states such as California, Washington, Oregon, Michigan, and Nebraska. With regard to any chemicals used in the production cycle I can only speak to the beans grown here in the Magic Valley of Southern Idaho. However, dry edible beans use far fewer agents in their production than many other crops.

Dry beans are included in many online resource listings comparing foods grown organically versus non-organically. Beans and other legumes, fall into the class of the "Top 20 products that you don't "Have" to buy organically". This is because the actual "seed" matures inside the pods of the plants and not in the soil. The pod provides protection unlike flowering seed plants.

There are three main areas where chemicals are used, one being fertilizers to promote vigorous plant health, herbicides to destroy weed plants that would choke and kill the bean plants, and pesticides to control insects that may feed on the bean plants during the growing season.

Typical fertilizer used is a combination of powered phosphates and nitrogen, with some potash and many growers also used animal manure from local dairy operations because it is prevalent and inexpensive. These are applied well before planting time, tilled into the soil and water is applied to balance out the levels.

Herbicides are also applied before planting to the soil and are specific in targeting certain weeds. Beans are planted several weeks later and from that point on weeds are controlled by cultivating where a tractor pulling a cultivating attachment moves through the bean rows and cuts and pulls any weeds from the soil. The typical brand names of these agents are, Sonalan, Eptam, Sevin, and Colmite. Not all are used it is grower and area specific but most use Sonalan and or Eptam.

In the case of pesticides any use of these products is the exception not the rule due to the low percentages of pest incidence, especially in the Western most bean growing states of Idaho and Washington. There are of course many insects that may attack beans plants, and most are aphid or mites that feed on the plant damaging its' vigor and ability to produce mature seeds. Only the most serious outbreaks are typically treated with airborne sprays because the costs outweigh the benefits.

Once an infestation takes hold it's usually too late to stop. The control of these types of insects is also managed by the rotation and placement of different crops relative to their attractiveness by the insect. Alfafa is the first choice of these pests as a food source but after the first cutting of Alfafa they may move

into bean fields. Weather also has an impact on the proliferation of pests. Prolonged freezing temperatures during the winter can significantly reduce the degree of outbreaks the following summer growing season. Should airborne pesticides be employed the agents are dispensed as a fog and act upon the pests and dissipate quickly into the surrounding air. The actual bean seeds are protected in the pods from direct contact with the chemicals, and the chemicals become inert soon after exposure to open air.

Some people have expressed deep and great concern over the use of Roundup to kill post harvest weeds and plant growth. I share this concern and to my knowledge this is is not practiced at all on dry beans. This is a method employed with Soybeans only. We do not purchase, grow, package or sell soybeans.

I am not a botanist or an agronomist or anything of the sort, so I cannot comment on any possible trace amounts or residues that may be absorbed and present in the mature bean. This would of course require a scientific chemical analysis. There is likely to be some information available on the web. I referenced a document from the EPA which discusses the use and effects of Eptam. This report described residuals left behind, found that any measureable amounts were less than, 5 one hundredths parts per million.(<0.05 ppm) For all intents and purposes this amounts to non-detectable or zero.

I cannot say whether this applies to the other possible agents that are used but for myself I've been around beans and bean farms all my life. I am now 65 and my Mother lived to be 97. My three older sisters all are in great health. My Father died of Pancreatic cancer attributed to steady but not extreme use of cigarettes and alcohol for 60 years. I have never heard of any illnesses ascribed to beans and lentils grown using the typical chemicals we see. All of our bean and lentils seeds have been developed using standard plant breeding methods of single plant selection and mating to achieve more disease resistant plants with strong yield potential and of course the color and shape that is desired. No genetic modification is done nor is it practiced in the dry edible bean industry. However, this does not hold true for soybeans, which we do not handle.

Obviously a completely organic growing method would be more comforting. The costs to the grower to grow organically are very high and to make it work they must choose specific crops that they know they can sell. Heirloom varieties are produced in such small quantities it is not possible to have them grown organically without taking very strong and risky financial positions on crops that may or may not have a market. Growers require fixed contracts to be paid no matter the circumstance, whether they get a crop or not. The pressure can only be managed by using conventional growing methods where we have more choices of growers to work with and the grower has better potential for good yields per acre.

I hope this helps you understand a little more about bean production and allay any possible trepidation you may have concerning trace chemical carryover. If you are of a mind that any amount is unacceptable, than I would recommend you seek out strictly organically grown products.

Good health to you and yours. Sincerely, Jim Soran