Hummus goes mainstream

By MICHELE KAYAL
For The Associated Press

When a recent snowstorm threatened, David Durcak didn’t take chances. He stocked up on hummus.

“I bought some yesterday but I’m buying a second to keep on hand,” he said while shopping in the deli aisle of an Arlington, Va. supermarket. “I like to see it in the house.”

Not a sentiment you’d have been likely to hear a decade ago, when Durcak— and most Americans — had yet to embrace the creamy puree of chickpeas, sesame seed butter and garlic then rarely seen outside Middle Eastern and vegetarian circles.

Today, hummus has grown into a more than $1.6 billion business.

Mainstream grocers give it significant real estate; restaurant menus tout seemingly infinite varieties, and insiders speculate it is well on its way to becoming the next salad dressing.

“I don’t see this thing slowing down any time soon,” said Rick Schaffer, vice president of sales and marketing for Taunton, Mass.-based hummus maker Tribe Mediterranean Foods. He expects growth to push the industry to $2.5 billion during the next four years.

And there’s plenty of room — and precedent — for that. As ubiquitous a sandwich spread and dip hummus has become, Rubin estimates fewer than 10 percent of American households have tried it yet.

Yet just 10 years ago, hummus was about a $50 million business powered by just a handful of companies. Today there are more than 80 companies and last year sales increased 25 percent, according to ACNielsen.

Arabic for chickpea, hummus began its commercial American life in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean restaurants. From there, it trickled into natural foods stores, then into bagel shops, where it got more mainstream exposure.

“When I came to the business in the early 1990s, hummus was an unknown commodity in the general market,” said Yehuda Pearl, chairman of Astoria, N.Y.-based Blue & White Foods, which markets Saba brand hummus.

The secret behind making hummus at home

By MICHELE KAYAL
For The Associated Press

You’d think creating the perfect hummus would be easy. After all, it’s just a simple but rich puree of chickpeas, tahini, garlic and lemon juice.

But it’s the subtle tweaks that can make the increasingly popular spread go from good to great — and hummus makers are notoriously secretive about giving up their recipes.

“If you go to any place that sells hummus (that’s good), it would be easier to get their children than to get their recipe,” said Yehuda Pearl, chairman of Astoria, N.Y.-based Blue & White Foods, which markets Saba brand hummus.

Hummus, the deceptively simple Middle East puree, needs good ingredients and specific techniques to hit the smooth but hefty texture that connoisseurs strive for.

But substituting edamame, black beans or other ingredients for the chickpeas — as many restaurants have taken to doing — can raise eyebrows among purists.

“Hummus is Arabic for chickpea,” said Theodore Roa, a chef who teaches Mediterranean cooking and America in Hyde Park, N.Y. “Having tofu hummus is not hummus. It’s not the real deal. That’s what it’s about.”

Classic Hummus

Start to finish: 15 hours, 20 minutes active

1 cup dried chickpeas
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 cup cold water
Butt Skewers (20 total)

Butt Skewers (20 total)

Butt Skewers (20 total)

Butt Skewers (20 total)

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