

# THE RANCHO GORDO CHILI MANIFESTO



Chili is one of our best dishes. It's a marriage of the new and old worlds and it acknowledges our huge debt to our neighbors south of the border. Each cook can do little things to make it his or her own but the heart and soul of the dish is chile with meat. Chile con carne. As with most good food, if you use the right ingredients, you need to stay out of the way and let them shine.

As explained in *A Bowl of Red* by Frank X. Tolbert, the "original" chili was "simply bite size or coarsely ground beef or other mature meats (never, never veal) cooked slowly and for a long time in boon companionship with the pulp of the chili peppers, crushed powder from the curly leaves of oregano, ground cumin seeds (comino in Spanish and sometimes so labeled), and chopped garlic cloves." This should be our guide when making any chili. It's fine to add beans, tomatoes and onions, and even innovate if you like, but it's important to keep in mind that the soul of this dish is chiles, cheap cuts of beef and long, slow cooking.

Chili was clearly "poor people's food" so the addition of beans makes a lot of sense to me. A Texan wouldn't agree but they'd have a pot of beans going at the same time as the chili. They just wouldn't mix them, and that seems fine to me. They are two different sensations.

For tomatoes, I can go either way. They add a sweetness and a different flavor but my inner butch chef loves the idea of pure chiles and pure chile flavor.

For oregano, I don't believe you can beat our Oregano Indio. Crush some between your hands and smell the oils as they release and you know you're doing the right thing.

I love chili in almost all of its forms and the story isn't over yet. This dish keeps evolving and I hope that your next pot continues the tradition of being a magnet for good friends. It's hard to be in a bad mood with a bowl of red in front of you and pals all around. - *Steve Sando*

## TEXAS BOWL OF RED

Frank X. Tolbert's *A Bowl of Red* is one of my favorite books on chili and I'm hardly alone. It's not a recipe book, though. We've taken the liberties and adapted his recipe to work with our chile powder in your kitchen. He might not recognize his recipe here but I think, perhaps naively, that he'd approve.

The recipe calls for cayenne pepper, but I suspect this was from an era when chile powder was often not very hot. We would suggest subbing the cayenne for a spoonful of our Rio Fuego Very Hot Sauce.

Tolbert recommends 4 tablespoons of chile powder per pound of meat. We're stopping at half a cup here!

Serves 4-6

*3 pounds stewing beef, lean*  
*¼ cup rendered beef suet (tallow) or a neutral cooking oil like canola or grapeseed*  
*3 cloves garlic, chopped*  
*1 yellow onion, diced medium fine*  
*½ cup Rancho Gordo 100% Pure New Mexican Chile Powder*  
*1 tablespoon Rancho Gordo Oregano Indio, crushed in your hands*  
*1 tablespoon Rancho Gordo Mexican Oregano, crushed in your hands*  
*1 teaspoon ground cumin*  
*1 tablespoon powdered cayenne pepper (optional)*  
*1 tablespoon Rancho Gordo Sal de Mar (sea salt)*  
*2 tablespoons masa harina*  
*2 cups cooked Rancho Gordo heirloom beans and their broth (optional)*

In a Dutch oven that can hold at least four quarts, cast iron being best, heat the suet or oil and then sear the beef in batches until the outsides are brown. Remove and reserve the meat.

To the fat left in the pot, add the garlic and onions and saute until soft, about 10 minutes. Add the chile powder and allow it to toast, stirring constantly, for about 5 minutes. Add the oreganos, cumin and optional cayenne, stirring so the ingredients are toasted but not scorching. Put the reserved meat in the pot and add enough water to cover all the ingredients by about 2 inches. Bring to a boil, lower the heat and then let simmer for 30 minutes.

Add salt and test for seasoning. Reduce heat so that the chili is at a gentle simmer for 45 minutes. Occasionally stir gently to mix the ingredients but be gentle with the beef pieces.

In a small bowl or Pyrex measuring cup, make a slurry with the masa harina and warm water. Mix well and then add it to the chili. Bring back to a simmer and continue cooking for another 30 minutes.

If there are no Texans present, add the optional cooked beans and broth to the pot and stir gently and simmer on low for about 10 minutes. (Steve's note: You won't be sorry.)

You can take the pot off the stove and chill the contents. Once chilled, you can degrease it. If you used the suet, it's probably a good idea. If you didn't, it's not necessary, especially if you used lean meat.

Serve with cornbread.

## BEANS OR NO BEANS?

### RENDERED TALLOW

We like Robb Walsh's new book, *The Chili Cookbook* (10 Speed Press 2015). Actually, we love all of Robb Walsh's books. We asked him for some advice on rendering beef fat and he pointed us to this passage from *The Chili Cookbook*:

If you refrigerate the beef fat, it is easier to run through a meat grinder. Melting the ground fat in a slow oven takes longer but it avoids splatters on the stovetop.

This recipe makes 2 ½ pounds (3 ¾ cups)

Preheat the oven to 250F. Grind 4 pounds of chilled beef fat in a meat grinder into a coarse mash and place it in a roasting pan in the preheated oven. Allow the fat to melt for 1 hour or more, until mostly liquid. Ladle the melted fat into a 9 by 13 inch baking dish. Discard the crust of the unmelted solids.

Allow the baking dish to cool on the counter, then place it in the refrigerator overnight.

Cut the fat into fifteen 2-ounce (about ¼ cup) pieces, wrap the squares in aluminum foil, then store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week or the freezer for up to 3 months.

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I always poke fun at Texans who insist on “no beans” in chili. It’s tradition! You don’t mess with that! Except, apparently, when it comes to Tex-Mex and Velveeta and other innovations. I think you should do what you like, but consider making a beanless chili and really understand why Texans, and others, are so passionate about their traditions. I love some beans in my chili and I especially love using bean broth instead of some of the water. It’s a rich, velvety base that takes nothing away from the chile or meat, but I’m not a big fan of the very thick and bean-dense chili, similar to what comes out of a can. The beans in that situation feel like filler. The stars of the dish are chiles and meat. Everything else should support them.

# BISON CHOCOLATE CHILI

I love bison meat and apparently bison are gentler on the environment than traditional cattle. It's a shame bison meat is not more popular or available, but you can usually find it ground in the meat section of well-stocked grocery stores.

Make sure you don't use more chocolate than is called for, or the dish will be cloyingly sweet. You can swap out the Vaquero for any of our chili beans you have on hand.

Serves 6



*1 pound ground bison*  
*¼ cup olive oil, plus a little extra if needed*  
*1 white onion, chopped*  
*5 garlic cloves, minced*  
*⅓ cup Rancho Gordo 100% Pure New Mexican Red Chile Powder*  
*2 tablespoons Rancho Gordo Oregano Indio*  
*2 tablespoons ground cumin*  
*2 cups water*  
*½ tablet Rancho Gordo Stoneground Chocolate, broken into pieces*  
*2 cups drained cooked Vaquero beans, plus 1 cup broth*  
*1 red bell pepper, roasted, peeled, seeded, and chopped*  
*1 yellow bell pepper, roasted, peeled, seeded, and chopped*  
*1 cup stale beer*  
*1 tablespoon Rancho Gordo Sal de Mar*  
*Scant 1 teaspoon sugar, if needed*  
*Corn bread for serving*

In a large pot, cook the bison meat over medium heat, stirring and breaking it up with a wooden spoon and adding a little oil if the meat is particularly dry. When the meat is no longer pink, using a slotted spoon, transfer it to a bowl and set aside. Add the ¼ cup oil to the pot and sauté the onion and garlic over medium heat until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the chile powder and stir until a paste forms. “Fry” the paste for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the oregano, cumin, and 1 cup of the water and mix well. Reduce the heat to low and cook for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the chocolate and stir until incorporated. Add the beans and the bean broth, the bell peppers, the beer, the salt, the remaining 1 cup water, and the reserved meat. Stir well, taste, and adjust the seasoning with salt as needed, keeping in mind that the flavors will intensify as the chili cooks down. Cover partially, reduce the heat to very low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the flavors are blended, about 45 minutes.

Taste and adjust the seasoning again. If the chili is a little bitter, add the sugar to smooth the flavors. Spoon the chili into warmed individual bowls and serve immediately, accompanied with corn bread.

## POWDER OR PODS?

### THE RANCHO GORDO CHILI BEANS

Alubia Blanca  
Ayocote Morado  
Ayocote Negro  
Caballero  
Domingo Rojo  
Eye of the Goat  
Midnight  
Moro  
Pinto  
Rebosero  
Rio Zape  
Royal Corona  
San Franciscano  
Sangre de Toro  
Sta Maria Pinquito  
Vaquero  
Yellow Indian Woman

So do you make your chili with dried chile pods or a powder?

If you use powder, are you using chili powder or chile powder?

Chili Powder, with an “i” at the end, has spices and sometimes preservatives mixed in with powder. If you like a brand and prefer that they do the mixing for you, this is the way to go. Chile Powder, with an “e” at the end, is simply ground chiles. This is my preference. It’s not so hard to add cumin, oregano and salt, is it? Rancho Gordo’s Chile Powder is ground from medium-hot New Mexican chiles, grown and dried in New Mexico.

I used to be a purist and only would use whole pods but I have to admit, the powder is great. The secret is to make sure there’s enough time to cook the sauce or you can have a grainy, almost chalky texture and this is not a nice thing. Normally I “fry” my powder in a little olive oil or lard with garlic and oregano, almost as they fry spices in India.

## CHILI VERDE WITH VAQUERO BEANS

Chili Verde is simply a green chile stew. There are countless variations but the best ones use a good mix of poblano chiles and tomatillos.

Tomatillos, like potatoes and tomatoes, are in the nightshade family. They're easy to grow and it's likely you just need to plant them once and you'll have naturalized volunteer plants ever after. The sweetest are the small purple ones that grow among the corn stalks, called milperos. If you come across some, throw them into your soil and see what happens next Spring.

Serve it with corn tortillas, rice and even coleslaw.  
Serves 8 to 10

*3 cups cooked Rancho Gordo Vaquero, or any other of our heirloom beans for chili, in their broth*  
*2 tablespoons vegetable oil*  
*½ of a medium onion, chopped (about 1 cup)*  
*3 garlic cloves, finely chopped*  
*1 teaspoon ground cumin seeds*  
*One 3-pound boneless pork shoulder, trimmed of excess fat and cut into ¾-inch pieces*  
*8 poblano chiles roasted, peeled and cut into strips*  
*8 fresh tomatillos, husks removed and chopped*  
*1 small handful of fresh cilantro leaves*  
*1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano*  
*1 to 2 cups chicken broth (enough to just cover the pork)*  
*Salt and freshly ground pepper*

In a soup pot or Dutch oven over medium heat, warm the oil. Add the onion, garlic, and cumin and saute until the vegetables are soft and fragrant, about 10 minutes. Add the pork, chiles, tomatillos, cilantro leaves, and oregano. Pour in enough chicken broth to cover the pork. Season with salt and pepper and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook until the pork is tender and shreds easily with a fork, 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Add the beans and cook for 30 minutes. Adjust seasoning with more salt if needed. Ladle the chili into warmed bowls and garnish with chopped cilantro.

(You can also cook the chili up to the point of adding beans, allow it to cool and then refrigerate over night and remove the fat that has risen. Add the beans and then gently heat until warmed through.)

# WHITE BEAN AND TURKEY CHILI

“White Chili” always struck me as one of those awful potluck dishes I’ve lived my life trying to avoid. Of course I’d never had it, but why let that little fact stop me from judging it? Well guess what? It’s delicious, but it’s just got almost nothing to do with “chili.” As the dish is so rich, I think a squeeze of lime at the end makes it perfect.

Serves 4-6



*3 cups cooked Rancho Gordo Royal Corona, Ayocote Blanco, Alubia Blanca or Cassoulet beans, in their broth*

*2 tablespoons olive oil*

*2 pounds ground turkey*

*1 smoked turkey thigh, diced (optional, but adds a nice, smoky flavor)*

*1 medium onion, chopped (about ½ cup)*

*3 garlic cloves, minced*

*2 Poblano chiles, roasted, peeled and diced*

*2-3 serrano chiles, seeded and finely sliced*

*1 teaspoon toasted ground coriander seeds*

*2 tablespoons toasted and ground cumin seeds*

*1 teaspoon cayenne pepper*

*1 teaspoon Rancho Gordo Mexican Oregano*

*1 bay leaf*

*salt and pepper*

*1 dozen tomatillos, husks removed and blanched in boiling water for 5 minutes until soft, then roughly chopped*

*1 cup chicken broth (possibly more)*

*Suggested garnishes:*

*Chopped cilantro*

*Sliced green onions*

*Crumbled queso fresco*

*Sour cream*

In a large heavy-bottomed soup pot or Dutch oven, over medium heat, warm 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Brown the ground turkey, breaking it up with a spoon as you go. As soon as the turkey has lost its pink color, remove it from the pot with a slotted spoon and set aside.

If using smoked turkey, in the same pot, over medium heat, warm the other tablespoon of olive oil. Add diced turkey thigh and cook until not quite brown. Add the onion and garlic and cook until soft (about 10 minutes). Return the ground turkey to the pot along with the chiles, coriander, cumin, cayenne, oregano, bay leaf, and a little salt and pepper. Stir well to combine. Add the tomatillos and chicken broth. Reduce heat, and simmer, uncovered, for 45 minutes. Gently stir in beans, check seasoning; add more chicken broth if desired and cook for another 30 minutes. Garnish individual bowls with whichever toppings you like.

## ONE CORNBREAD

Our own Julia Newberry has her own family tradition of chili and cornbread, despite being a product of Northern California. Her mother has roots in Atlanta, GA, and this is her recipe for classic cornbread.

*1 cup cornmeal*  
*1 ½ cups flour*  
*½ cup sugar (optional)*  
*4 ½ tsp baking powder*  
*1 tsp salt*  
*1 ½ cups whole milk or buttermilk*  
*2 eggs*  
*3 tbsp oil*

In a bowl, combine the cornmeal, flour, sugar (if using), baking powder, and salt and mix with a slotted spoon. In another bowl, beat together the milk, eggs, and oil. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir until combined.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Grease a square 8-by-8-inch pan. Pour in the batter and bake for about 20 minutes, until just golden on the top and a toothpick inserted into the cornbread comes out clean.

## ANOTHER CORNBREAD

My pal Taylor Boetticher of Fatted Calf loves chili con carne. If you think Texans are passionate about their chili, you should hear them rant about cornbread.

From Taylor, via his mother (thank you, Ma'am!), here is the Boetticher family cornbread recipe.

*2 tablespoons butter*  
*1 ⅓ cups yellow cornmeal*  
*⅓ cup flour*  
*3 tablespoons sugar*  
*1 teaspoon salt*  
*1 teaspoon baking soda*  
*2 cups milk*  
*1 cup buttermilk*  
*2 large eggs*

Preheat oven to 400F. Place the butter in a 9- or 10-inch cast iron skillet and place in oven for 5 min. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, mix cornmeal, flour, sugar, salt, and baking soda. Stir in ONE cup of the milk and the buttermilk. Add the eggs and blend thoroughly. Pour the batter into the hot skillet and carefully pour the remaining ONE cup of milk into the batter. Don't worry that it looks too runny. DO NOT STIR. The milk will sink and form a custard-like layer. Place in preheated oven and bake 30-35 min. Serve while hot.



# CHASEN'S FAMOUS CHILI

I'm not vouching for this recipe but it's made the rounds for years as the chili that Elizabeth Taylor had flown in from Hollywood while she was making the movie Cleopatra in Rome. Whether it's the truth or legend, it seems a decent enough old-school potluck kind of chili.

It's part of chili history but I can't bring myself to actually make it with so many other options available. Others swear by it. I'll keep an open mind and make it some day.

***"The chili is so good. All gone now. Please send me ten quarts of your wonderful chili in dry ice to 448 Via Appia pignatelli. – Love and kisses, Elizabeth Taylor."***

*½ pound Rancho Gordo Pinto beans*  
*Water*  
*1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes in juice*  
*1 large green bell pepper chopped*  
*2 tablespoons vegetable oil*  
*3 cups coarsely chopped onions*  
*2 cloves garlic, crushed*  
*½ cup parsley, chopped*  
*½ cup butter*  
*2 pounds beef chuck, coarsely chopped*  
*1 pound pork shoulder, coarsely chopped*  
*1/3 cup Gebhardt's chili powder\**  
*1 tablespoon salt*  
*1 ½ teaspoons pepper*  
*1 ½ teaspoons Farmer Brothers ground cumin*

*\*Do yourself a huge favor and avoid this stuff. Use our New Mexican Chile Powder, which is pure chile, and add some Mexican oregano. You'll be much better off.*

Rinse the beans, picking out debris. Place beans in a Dutch oven with water to cover. Boil for two minutes. Remove from heat. Cover and let stand one hour. Drain off liquid.

Rinse beans again. Add enough fresh water to cover beans. Bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer covered, for one hour or until tender.

Stir in tomatoes and their juice. Simmer five minutes. In a large skillet, sauté bell pepper in oil for five minutes. Add onion and cook until tender, stirring frequently. Stir in the garlic and parsley. Add mixture to bean mixture. Using the same skillet, melt the butter and sauté beef and pork chuck until browned. Drain. Add to bean mixture along with the chili powder, salt, pepper and cumin.

Bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat. Simmer, covered, for one hour. Uncover and cook 30 minutes more or to desired consistency. Chili shouldn't be too thick - it should be somewhat liquid but not runny like soup. Skim off excess fat and serve.

## COOKING BEANS

Normally on a bean cooking day (which frankly is everyday at Rancho Gordo), we put the beans to soak in the morning, after rinsing in lots of cool water and checking for small debris. We cover the beans by about an inch or so. If you haven't soaked, don't fret. Go ahead and cook them, knowing it will take a bit longer.

Heirloom and heritage varieties don't need a lot of fussing if they are used fresh, which I'd define as within two years. You can use a ham bone, chicken stock or as I prefer, simply a few savory vegetables. A classic mirepoix is a mix of onion, celery and carrot diced fine and sautéed in some kind of fat, often olive oil. A crushed clove of garlic doesn't hurt. If I'm cooking Mexican or Southwestern, I will sauté just onion and garlic in mild bacon drippings or even freshly rendered lard.

Add the beans and their soaking water to a large pot. You have been told before to change the water and rinse the beans. The thinking now is that vitamins and flavor can leech out of the beans into the soaking water you are throwing down the sink. There is conflicting scientific evidence that changing the water cuts down on the gas. If you want to, do it. If it seems unnecessary, don't.

If you've soaked them, the beans will have expanded, so make sure they are still covered by at least an inch, maybe a bit more. Add the sautéed vegetables and give a good stir. Raise your heat to medium high and bring to a hard boil. Keep the beans at a boil for about ten to fifteen minutes. After so many years, I think this is the moment that really matters. You have to give them a good hard boil to let them know you're the boss and then reduce them to a gentle simmer, before covering. I like to see how low I can go and still get the occasional simmering bubble. Open and close the lid, or keep it ajar to help control the heat and allow evaporation. The bean broth will be superior if it's had a chance to breathe and evaporate a little.

When the beans are almost ready, the aroma will be heady. They won't smell so much like the vegetables you've cooked but the beans themselves. At this point, I'd go ahead and salt them. Go easy as it takes awhile for the beans to absorb the salt. If you want to add tomatoes or acids like lime or vinegar, wait until the beans are cooked through.

If the bean water starts to get low, always add hot water from a tea kettle. Many believe that cold water added to cooking beans will harden them. At the very least, it will make the cooking take that much longer to bring them back to a simmer. We don't recommend using hot tap water, straight from a water heater. Better to heat the tap water in a tea kettle or pan first.

Once you've mastered this method, go ahead and try some different techniques. Your bean friends will swear by this or that method and you should take their advice, keeping in mind there are few absolutes when it comes to cooking beans, only that it's very hard work to mess up a pot of beans.

### **The Rancho Gordo Chili Manifesto**

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*Produced by Steve Sando and Julia Newberry with support from the Rancho Gordo staff. Huge thanks to Taylor Boetticher, Robb Walsh and Julia and Taylor's moms for the cornbread recipes.*

*For more information and recipes, please visit [www.ranchogordo.com](http://www.ranchogordo.com)*