



Brownies made with 40% chickpeas? That's Pure Genius...

Pure Genius brownies are moist, indulgent, and satisfying. They also happen to contain 40% chickpeas (garbanzo beans are the #1 ingredient), flaxseed and oats, and half the calories of a regular brownie, coupled with a meaningful amount of fiber and protein.

But no one buys a brownie because its "healthy," says **Pure Genius Provisions** founder Nancy Kalish, who launched her bean-packed wares at Expo East last September and immediately caught the attention of Whole Foods Market.

"Even though I am a health-conscious person myself, I hate being asked to buy something just because it's low-calorie or healthier, especially if it is a treat," stresses Kalish, a health journalist with a sweet tooth who decided to put her money where her mouth is.

"I want people to love them, and then discover that they just happen to be better for you – although I am absolutely not saying this is a health food."

"These are still a treat, but from a nutritional perspective, we've got a pretty hefty 2.5oz (71g) gluten-free brownie with 4g protein, 4g fiber and 11g of sugar with under 200 calories. It's about half the calories and way less sugar than a regular brownie."

Kalish, who now sells her brownies (MSRP \$3.49) in Whole Foods' northeast region, independent and specialty stores, some foodservice accounts, and online, adds: *"I wanted one good sized serving that would really satisfy people, with clean, vegan ingredients, no gluten, and not too much sugar."*

As for the chickpeas, 'beans' get a call-out on the front of pack, but Kalish is not building her marketing around them – at least not at this stage – as she wants consumers to be pleasantly surprised to see beans in a brownie that tastes incredible, but potentially put off before they have even tried the product.

That said, this could always change as consumer perceptions of pulses are evolving so rapidly, she says, in part because the meteoric rise of hummus along with the success of Millennial-friendly brands such as Beanitos and Banza.

“I’ve been traveling around the country going to trade shows and to stores and beans are becoming much more widespread. It’s like quinoa, which no one could even pronounce a few years ago.”



“I always wanted chickpeas to be the #1 ingredient. I hate it when you see foods and they say ‘contains beans’ or whatever the healthy ingredient is, and then you check the label and it turns out that beans are way down the bottom of the ingredients list. Our brownies and blondies contain more than 40% beans by weight, so they are our first ingredient.”

Nancy Kalish, founder, Pure Genius Provisions

The formulation took a long time to perfect, says Kalish, who came up with the initial recipe and then worked with a food scientist to tweak the formula in order to increase the shelf life, without using synthetic preservatives.

“I discovered that a teeny bit of oregano oil – so little that you can’t taste it at all – could take the shelf life up from one week to five weeks.”

Chickpeas were not even in her original formulations, she says: *“I started with mashed black beans, and tried to make brownies using them from recipes on the internet. But to be honest most of them were awful. They tasted like beans and some even smelled really bad. My husband [her chief taster in the early days] was pretty sick of them and I was just about ready to give up.*

“But there was something there, especially on the texture side. They were moist, fudgy, rich and satisfying, so I had to figure out how to get ride of the taste but keep the texture. So I switched from black beans to chickpeas and that was really the turning point.”

Nailing the taste involved a *“combination of adding the ingredients in a certain order and processing them first for the right amount of time,”* says Kalish. *“I can’t say much more than that without giving too much away. But chickpeas are really adaptable – like tofu – they can take on the flavor of other ingredients.”*

Deep chocolate brownie ingredients: garbanzo beans, maple syrup, gluten-free chocolate, (evaporated cane juice, natural chocolate liquor, non-dairy cocoa butter) sunflower oil, gluten-free oats, unsweetened cocoa powder, oregano, flax, pure flavor extracts, sea salt.



After nailing the formula, she said, *“It was the usual entrepreneur story. I was baking for friends and family and people were saying, these are really good, you should bring them to market, so I thought why not, and I decided to book a booth at Expo East in Baltimore last year.*

“I really had no idea how much work was involved,” adds Kalish, who was running so close to the wire as the show approached that she had to FedEx samples to the venue overnight in order to have product at her booth for day one of the show.

But the hard work paid off, says Kalish: *“I was really lucky as someone that tasted my samples pulled over the northeast sales director at Whole Foods and said you have to try these.”* Months of hard work followed, but she had got her first account (Whole Foods in the northeast).

“I just got the go-ahead to go into Whole Foods’ southern region and that will be another 40 additional stores, but I’m also talking to cafes, coffee chains, schools, collages, hotels; we have a foodservice program where we do trays of baked and cut brownies.”



As for placement, the brownies have done well next to regular packaged brownies and cash registers where they are sold in display boxes, she says.

“But you have to support your brand,” says Kalish, who is planning a Kickstarter campaign to support the launch of new products and will likely seek additional investment later in the year to fund her expansion, plus a move into products outside the baked goods space.

“We had to do two demos a month in every Whole Foods store in the region, which meant hiring a demo company, plus you have all the promos and merchandising costs – which all add up, but you’ve got to do these things, and we can now see it paying off, as we are finally starting to see products by the pallet!”

So what advice would she give to other aspiring food entrepreneurs?

“If I had known how hard it was going to be, I would still have done it, as no one day is ever like the next and you never stop learning,” she says.

“But problems do tend to have crazy domino effects – so one problem causes another problem causes another problem, and so on. Deliveries not on time, equipment breaking down, product that is supposed to be shipped frozen to store but isn’t, that you have to pull from stores at your own expense.

“Let’s just say that it has been extremely character-building. But you have to stay calm and carry on.”