**A Hill o’ Beans with a Proud Past**

*Camellia Brand, approaching 100 years*

Red beans and rice, that emblematic dish of Louisiana Creole cooking, has made its mark on every Monday in the city of New Orleans from time immemorial. For nearly 100 years, the only bean of choice has been Camellia Brand.

Louis Armstrong gave the popular legume the spotlight by signing his letters with a playful “Red Beans and Ricely Yours.” The restaurant-rating system of *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* indicated excellence not with stars, but with red beans. A block-busting Red Bean Parade celebrates the culinary tradition every “Lundi Gras.” Beans, beans and more beans are the magical meal of many households below the Mason-Dixon line; red beans are such an integral part of Southern culture – especially in New Orleans – that it’s hard to imagine life without their comforting goodness.

Camellia Brand Red Kidney Beans are the cornerstone of L.H. Hayward & Company, a family business in its fourth generation and just a few years shy of a century in operation. Vince Hayward is now CEO at the helm of the company established by his great-grandfather, Lucius H. Hayward Jr., in 1923.

L.H. Hayward Jr., the son of a New Orleans mercantile family, began his career as a horse-and-buggy travelling salesman for the developing National Biscuit Company, later to become known as ‘Nabisco’. Eventually, Hayward established himself as a dry-goods broker, and in 1923, opened his own wholesale business along the Mississippi River on Front Street in New Orleans, where he offered dried beans and peas, along with fresh produce. Within two years, when the city’s Board of Trade created a committee on beans and peas, L.H. Hayward was prominent enough in the business to be offered a seat.

The Hayward family history in this country dates back to the 1830s, when Sawyer Hayward, an Englishman, arrived in New Orleans via the West Indies and embarked on what proved to be an immensely successful career in the mercantile and agricultural trading business. The city’s Caribbean and Creole population had created a strong demand for dried beans, and the enterprising Hayward supplied dry goods and produce to retail vendors in the French Market. Later, his grandson, Lucius H. Hayward Sr., focused his efforts on foodways and founded the family’s bean company.

L.H. Hayward Jr.’s son, Gordon Hayward, a great innovator, created the ‘Camellia Brand,’ and made the revolutionary leap of packaging the beans in one- and two-pound cellophane bags, as they are still sold today and as they are found as a staple in many a pantry throughout the southern United States. This was in response to the mid-century rise of self-serve supermarkets, which overtook service-oriented local markets where grocers would scoop dry goods from barrels for each customer. In 1947, trademarking the name ‘Camellia Brand,’ after his mother’s favorite flower – the speckled variety, which is the oldest Camellia in the South – Gordon Hayward gave his beans an identity that consumers associate with top quality. Their instinct is right; the Haywards’ longstanding commitment to quality is embodied in their generational relationships with farmers who reserve their very best beans for Camellia. This highest quality rating has come to be known among growers as ‘The Hayward Standard’ and refers to the company’s expectation of excellence, from the farmer all the way to the consumer.

In 1974, L.H. Hayward & Company moved to its current location, a larger facility on the outskirts of New Orleans, where it processes and packages its famous red kidney beans, along with the eighteen additional varieties of beans and legumes that make up its full product line. Gordon Hayward’s sons nurtured the business for decades, and now his grandson, Vince Hayward, is running the company with a thoroughly modern and mindful outlook.

The value of the family heritage can’t be ‘bean-counted;’ it’s about the trust and respect that have been built over generations between Hayward’s forebears and their growers. “Our families have been working together for nearly a century, growing beans to the highest standard of goodness and getting them to market,” says Vince Hayward. “Not only does the public crave our beans, they know what to expect from every package. That trusted level of quality is our secret ingredient.”

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