

Claims:

1. A process for preparing a fermented white lentil beverage, the process comprising:
 - (a) soaking white lentils in water for at least ~~about~~ 30 min,
 - (b) removing the water from step (a) and adding new water to provide a mixture of white lentils and water in a wt ratio of ~~about~~ 1:20 to ~~about~~ 1:1,
 - (c) cooking the mixture of step (b) under pressure for ~~about~~ 10 to ~~about~~ 40 min,
 - (d) forming a paste from the cooked lentil mixture and adjusting the solid content of the paste to be ~~about~~ 7 to ~~about~~ 20 wt% before wet milling the resulting slurry,
 - (e) filtering the wet milled slurry of step (d) through a 10-150 micron membrane and incubating the slurry with amylase enzyme at a temperature at which the enzyme is active to reduce the starch content of the slurry,
 - (f) inactivating the amylase enzyme by heating, to produce a white lentil beverage, and
 - (g) inoculating the white lentil beverage with a lactic acid bacterial culture and incubating until the beverage reaches a pH of ~~about~~ 4.3 to ~~about~~ 4.6.
2. A process according to claim 1 wherein whole white lentils are soaked for at least 30 minutes in step (a) in water of ~~about~~ 95°C or crushed white lentils are soaked for at least 30 minutes in step (a) in water at ~~about~~ 4 to ~~about~~ 50°C.
3. A process according to claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the mixture of step (b) is cooked at ~~about~~ 100 to ~~about~~ 140°C in step (c), preferably at ~~about~~ 110 to ~~about~~ 130°C, more preferably at ~~about~~ 115 to ~~about~~ 125°C.
4. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the white lentil paste in step (d) is wet milled in a colloid mill.
5. A process according to any preceding claim wherein about 0.01 w/v% to 0.5 w/v% amylase enzyme is added in step (e), preferably 0.1 w/v%.
6. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the slurry is heated at 65°C in step (e).
7. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the wet milled slurry of step (d) is filtered through a 100 micron membrane in step (e).
8. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the starch content is reduced to less than about 5 wt% in step (e).

9. A process according to any preceding claim wherein ~~about~~0.1 to ~~about~~4 w/v% edible oil is added prior to or following step (f), preferably ~~about~~0.1 to ~~about~~3 w/v%.

10. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the white lentil beverage is incubated with a lactic acid bacterial culture selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus lactis*, *Lactobacillus* species, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Bifidobacterium* species, and *Leuconostoc* species.

11. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the white lentil beverage is incubated with a commercial yogurt culture comprising selected strains of *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* bacteria.

~~12. A fermented white lentil beverage prepared according to the process of any preceding claim.~~

~~13. A fermented white lentil beverage of pH of about 4.3 to about 4.6, comprising about 5 to about 15 wt% carbohydrate, about 2 to about 4.5 wt% edible oil and about 1.0 to about 2.5 wt% white lentil protein.~~

~~14. A fermented white lentil beverage of claim 13 comprising about 7 to about 10 wt% carbohydrate and 2 to about 3.5 wt% edible oil.~~

~~15. A fermented white lentil beverage of claim 13 or claim 14 comprising about 1.2 to about 2.0 wt% white lentil protein, preferably about 1.5 to about 1.8, 1.9 or 2.0 wt% white lentil protein.~~

~~16. A fermented white lentil beverage of any one of claims 13 to 15 in which the white lentil protein is substantially non-aggregated.~~

~~17. A fermented white lentil beverage of any one of claims 13 to 16 in which the average particle size is less than 100 µm.~~

~~18. A fermented white lentil beverage of any one of claims 13 to 17 which does not contain any added stabilising agents.~~

~~19. A fermented white lentil beverage of any one of claims 13 to 18 which is stable when heated to about 90–95 °C for about 3–5 minutes.~~

~~20. A fermented white lentil beverage of any one of claims 13 to 19 in which the proteins of the fermented white lentil beverage do not substantially aggregate when heated to about 90–95 °C for about 3–5 minutes.~~