

Look for...

Some of the products, restaurants, and distributors utilizing Shepherd's Grain products include:

Pacific Northwest

Grand Central Baking Co.
- pastry division
Market of Choice
Nature Bake

Portland

Big Town Hero
Dave's Killer Bread
DiPrima Dolci
Hot Lips Pizza
New Seasons Deli
Nostrana
Old Town Pizza
Pastaworks
St. Honoré Boulangerie

Salem

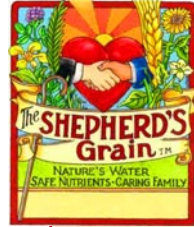
Cascade Baking

Spokane

Anthony's HomePort
The Davenport Hotel
HearthBread BakeHouse
Luna Restaurant
Sage Bakery
The Spokane Athletic Club
TR Rizzuto Pizza Crust, Inc.

Food Service

Bon Appétit Management Co.



ISSUE #2 Adding Value DECEMBER 2005

Adding Value

KARL KUPERS is co-founder of Shepherd's Grain, a cooperative of wheat farmers with lands in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

“ We are a small group of progressive family farmers—thirteen farmers, all owners of the company. Each farmer is using a direct-seed system and is certified by Food Alliance, a certification program for environmentally and socially responsible agricultural practices.

We spent three years testing the different wheat varieties to see which would produce the highest quality bread flour. The red wheat used for flour has not generally been raised in the Northwest—the majority of the wheat is a soft white wheat, which is exported to Asia for noodles. →



Photo: Debra Sohm Lawson

The Shepherd's Grain family of farms brings nearly 70,000 acres under a direct-seed system of agriculture. Pictured: Karl Kupers, with partners Mike, Jerry and Matt Stubbs.

➔ One thing a project like this will teach you is brand identity. More and more, people see Shepherd's Grain and know what it stands for. On every bag of Shepherd's Grain we preserve the identity of the farmer who grew the grain.

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There's a golf course in Harrington, Washington. The landowner right next to that golf course is a good farmer, someone who has kept up with the best available technologies in the conventional system. But every time he tills the soil, it shifts down. As a result, there's now a sixteen to eighteen inch difference in elevation—the tilled soil is that much lower than the golf course.



Tillage erosion is a very serious issue. Every time a piece of machinery lifts or inverts the soil, if that ground is on a slope, gravity will win. On the rolling topography of the Pacific Northwest, the soils are very prone to erosion. And when you lose that soil, it's gone.

About ten years ago, I started to change over from a conventional wheat production system to a direct-seed system. With direct seed, you never till the soil, ever. You seed into last year's standing residue. The new technology—the new drill—is able to do that.

What happens with direct seeding is you build up a microbial population in the top four inches. Those microbes—millions

and millions of them in a handful—till your soil. They create the aeration in the soil.

A similar system called no-till was tried in our area in the 1970s, but it failed because it was monocultured—wheat, on wheat, on wheat. So disease and other problems surfaced. With direct seeding, we emphasize crop diversity and rotation.

Today, through Shepherd's Grain, we also sell lentils, red beans and garbanzos.

Our practices allow us to keep our wheat varieties separate on the farm, and the mill in Spokane keeps them

separate as well. It gives us a real niche because identity preservation is almost impossible on a commodity basis.

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As we have changed our farming and marketing practices, we have literally changed from being producers of a bulk commodity crop—wheat—into producers of a value-added product—flour.

Our whole focus has been this idea of developing relationships and creating what we termed a "value chain." The idea is simply that supply chains, which constitute a typical food system, can be broken on pennies, but a value chain, which is developed on relationships, will weather those storms. If you think regionally and try to match up production to potential sales, it's a system that is developed and enhanced by relationships—face to face.

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It all goes back to a meeting we had in Portland at the very beginning, with a miller, a baker, and all of us sitting there. We talked about the whole concept. And of course, it immediately came back to the economics.

Wheat is generally priced through the commodity exchanges in Chicago, Kansas City and Minneapolis. But I said, 'We're not going to use the commodity prices.' I looked at the miller and said, 'How do you price your product?' And he said, 'Well, I figure my cost of production and add a reasonable rate of return.' I looked over at the baker, and he said the same thing. So I said, that's just what we're going to do.

As idealistic as that is, everybody understands it. And over the last two years, I've never had an argument over the price of our flour, because customers know that if they argue over the price, they're saying they don't want those farmers.

So it's a matter of: Can the story and the ideals behind that story bring value to the customer? Most of the time our price is going to be higher than a commodity-based product. But if it brings you value, then it's a good thing. Then it's sustainable. ”

—Karl Kupers

NOURISHING FOOD NETWORKS: The Farmer-Chef Connection builds from the ground up

Since 2001, the Farmer-Chef Connection conference has nurtured direct marketing opportunities for growers and buyers of local foods. Already a staple of the Portland food community, the annual conference—sponsored by the Portland Chapter of the Chefs Collaborative and Ecotrust—will be expanding this year to Seattle and Spokane as well.

At the conferences, farmers and ranchers join with chefs, grocery retailers, and institutional buyers to cultivate the relationships that put local foods on local plates.



Growers and buyers connect one-on-one during the "speed dating" portion of the Farmer-Chef Connection conference.

Along the way, everyone has a chance to witness first-hand the benefits of a diverse, regional food economy.

Rural-urban partnerships, forged one handshake at a time: the Farmer-Chef Connection project fosters food networks that thrive at human scales. Here in Salmon Nation.



Learn more:
www.ecotrust.org/foodfarms