

Local Wheat, Small Bites, People, Events, Connections

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Local Wheat? Could Be Sweet, Say West Side Bakers



Wheat growers west of the Cascades could bring in more profit by supplying wheat to local bakers, according to the results of a recent survey conducted by Washington State University graduate researcher Karen Hills. Sixty percent of western Washington commercial bakers said they are interested in purchasing locally sourced wheat and flour for their products. Those bakers presently use 5 million pounds of non-local flour annually.

“For the world of grain on the west side, that’s a significant number,” said Hills, based at the WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center. “As the local grain movement goes forward, it will be useful for growers to know what bakers are looking for. I want this information to further the local grain movement on this side of the state.”

In Washington, agricultural communities usually rely on large commodity supply chains for marketing their crops, especially small grains, Hills said. In addition, wheat is primarily grown as a rotation crop in northwestern Washington counties, with little economic return for growers. Yet the region’s consumers are passionate about eating locally grown food. West side

commercial bakers not only supply a means for getting local grain to consumers, but they also serve as one measure of consumer interest. Ironically, most of these bakers must order organic wheat and flour from outside their region.

“The local food movement here made sense to study, but so much of the research on local foods was geared toward produce and livestock,” she said. “Local grain production and bakers’ perspectives about it hadn’t been explored. So I thought they would be a good addition.”

Hills said she also wanted to learn what bakers were most concerned about when considering future purchases of regionally produced flour, what the barriers would be for using it, and what they considered “local.” She and Jessica Goldberger, a WSU rural sociologist in Pullman, developed a questionnaire to obtain that information, as well as demographics about bakery locations, distribution, percentage of sales direct to customers, and whether flour was milled on-site.

Last March, Hills surveyed more than 250 commercial bakers from 19 counties west of the Cascade Mountains, with 73 completing the questionnaire. Surveyed bakers were required to live in western Washington, purchase flour or wheat berries, and produce a broad range of bread and pastries. Eliminated from the pool were bakeries that are part of large national chains or that sell cakes, cupcakes, donuts, or pies exclusively.

While 60 percent of the respondents were interested in purchasing wheat or flour from western Washington, 36 percent indicated they didn’t know, which Hills said she wasn’t surprised to see. Only 3 percent answered no.

“There’s a lot of uncertainty because (local) wheat and flour are not widely available at this point,” she said. “That came through in other parts of the survey.”

Surveyed bakers listed flour quality, the consistency of that quality, a reliable supply, price, and flavor as their top five factors in purchasing regionally produced wheat and flour in the future. The top five barriers that would prevent them from doing so were cost, availability/quantity, suppliers/delivery, quality (gluten and protein content), and climate.



WSU graduate researcher Karen Hills. Photo: Brian Clark/Washington State University.

“Some of these factors would be greatly affected by the scale of flour processing and become more favorable for the bakers as the volume of western Washington flour processing increased,” Hills noted.



Wheat trial plots growing at the WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center. Photo: Brian Clark/Washington State University

Asked to define “local” wheat, 43 percent of bakers answered wheat grown within state boundaries, but Hills said she also received a wide spectrum of responses, ranging from within the Pacific Northwest to a specific county.

Hills’s research also ties in with the work of her adviser, Stephen Jones, a wheat geneticist at and director of the WSU NWREC. He is working with local growers to bring back a once-prolific west-side wheat growing heritage. Jones and others have identified 163 wheat varieties grown in the Pacific Northwest between the 1840s and

1955. They are crossing these historical varieties with modern ones to come up with wheat breeds best suited for growing in wet, cool coastal climates and conditions that can also resist diseases, compete with weeds and produce high yields.

To showcase these efforts and spark more interest in local grain systems, WSU NWREC hosted the inaugural Kneading Conference West, drawing 250 participants from 15 states and two Canadian provinces for workshops on baking, milling, farming, and malting. Jones and Hills were presenters at the conference, and Hills discussed her survey findings on a panel for small-scale grain growing that also included bakery owners.

“It’s not that we can’t grow grains here,” Hills said. “We have so many options for growing food here. There’s an excitement around rejuvenating a tradition that was important here 100 years ago and reclaiming something that was lost.”

–Nella Letizia

For more information about the WSU NWREC plant breeding program, visit plantbreeding.wsu.edu.

Small Bites

Little Kids Make Big Changes through WSU Extension Food \$ense Program

When Devin Drennen’s mother, Susan, offered her son ice cream for dessert, he asked for carrots instead. Why? The fifth-grader at Edison Elementary School in Tacoma learned through a nutrition class about the importance of eating fiber foods to maintain the health of the body’s digestive system. Students made carrot juice with a juicer and handled the fiber to see how it looked and felt. The hands-on lesson stuck.

“You know how ice cream is kind of healthy and kind of not? It has calcium, but it also has sugar,” Drennen said. “I asked for carrots because they are healthier. Fiber clears out the intestines.” [Read more »](#)



Devin Drennen (left with glasses) and Vincent Fefe measure plants growing in a garden at Edison Elementary School in Tacoma, Wash.

Taking a Team Approach to Environmental Challenges

A new Earth, Ecosystems and Society (EES) Fellows program has been formed at Washington State University to develop interdisciplinary teams of WSU faculty members to work on complex, strategically selected environmental challenges. The plan is to form teams of three to six members to work collaboratively for one to two years on particular themes. The EES is soliciting applications for the first theme—Water, Sustainability, and Climate—timed to coincide with the renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty. For more information and to apply, please visit <http://bit.ly/cereoees>. Applications are due Dec. 5, 2011. Fellows will work to generate new concepts and produce grant proposals addressing themes strategically chosen for their timeliness, funding prospects and connections to WSU’s mission, capacities and emphases. [Learn more »](#)

Sustainable Resource Development Project in Malawi

The southeastern African nation of Malawi faces many challenges, including deforestation; frequent food shortages; environmental degradation; limited access to inputs; credit and capital; acute shortages of energy and safe water; poor knowledge and skills to adopt productivity-enhancing technologies; weak extension services; and lack of market information.



A Malawi woman uses a treadle pump for small-scale irrigation.

SURELIVES is an ongoing project with the goal of increasing production and income of small-scale farmers through improved agricultural practices coupled with sustainable conservation and management of the area’s natural resource base. Since its start, SURELIVES has served almost 555 villages and more than 25,000 households in this impoverished region of Malawi. [Read more »](#)

Helping Sustain African Agriculture

WSU scientist Lynne Carpenter-Boggs is working with an international group of scientists to help find bean varieties and microbial inoculants that will improve yields of crops grown on the ancient soils so common in many parts of Africa. Dr. Carpenter-Boggs took a Flip camera to Africa and shot some wonderful footage of



Carpenter-Boggs

farms, people, and animals. [Watch the video »](#)

Ripple Effect

Ripple Effect is an Africa-based empowerment program created by Washington State University and Total Land Care, a now-independent non-profit organization conceptualized by WSU faculty members. Ripple Effect partners with the people of Malawi to empower individuals and communities. The true success of Ripple Effect lies in its sustainability. Ripple Effect provide a “hand up” not a “hand out” to Malawians, establishing partnerships with lasting positive impact to support people of this African nation lift themselves out of poverty. Your contributions are added to those of working Malawians to establish a pool of capital and technology that enlarges the circle of prosperity in one of the poorest parts of the planet. [Learn more about Ripple Effect »](#)

People

Turning Education into Entrepreneurship

Meet Margaret and Jason Parsley. 2010 graduates of, respectively, WSU’s programs in animal sciences and organic agriculture, they are now putting their educations to the real test: starting a new organic farm from the soil up. Margaret and Jason grow organic vegetables and raise a heritage breed of sheep-and a couple of camera-hogging alpaca. As they say in a



An alpaca

video recently produced by Green Times, it was the network of friends, mentors, and like-minded farmers that led them to the piece of land they are now working... and gave them the confidence to dig in and strike out on their own. [Watch the video](#) »

on the Parsley's farm just outside of Pullman, Wash.

Learn more about WSU's programs in [organic agriculture](#) » and [animal sciences](#) »

CSANR Is Going Social!

Please give a big thumbs-up to our friends and colleagues in the [WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources](#) by visiting their new [Facebook page](#) »

Creating Sustainable Connections

Green Times is pleased to be able to trade links with like-minded publications. Interested? [Contact the editor for more info](#). Here's a note from Sara Southerland, the outreach coordinator at Sustainable Connections:

In Whatcom County, Sustainable Connections' Food & Farming program helps to support new farmers and to connect consumers to local farms and fishers. Home of the "Eat Local First" campaign, the program produces a monthly e-newsletter that's a great resource for eating locally, and features farmer and restaurant profiles, links to important food issues, recipe ideas, and more. Get connected with Northwest Washington's ag and local food scene! [Click here to subscribe](#), go to the bottom right hand corner and click on Food & Farming News. See the current newsletter [here](#). For the Whatcom Food & Farm Finder map and guide, [click here](#).

Notes from the Tilth Producers Conference

Green Times staff attended the Dryland Agriculture Symposium at the recent Tilth Producers annual conference in Yakima, Wash. The keynote address by Bob Quinn was eye-opening and full of surprises. Quinn is a pioneer in growing native grains, diversified farming, and dryland vegetable production.

Farming around Big Sandy, Montana, at 5,000 feet, and with only 12 to 14 inches of precipitation a year, he was still getting decent yields of spuds, squash, corn and onions. His secret? Reduce plant density by one-third, and be happy with yields about one-third of those for irrigated crops. The lower density reduces competition and allows for more massive root systems to

develop.

Quinn also advocated for a home-grown, science-based approach to farming. “Keep records and look for trends. Don’t be afraid to experiment in order to find what works for you in your situation, but use controls so you have a baseline for comparisons. Incorporate animals whenever possible.”

Quinn said he is an organic farmer because “it’s scientifically sound, emotionally fulfilling because it addresses global issues... and it’s fun!”

Farmers Market Advocate of the Year

The Tilth Producers of Washington honored WSU Extension Educator Colleen Donovan for her critical role in developing and supporting Washington’s sustainable agriculture community by naming her their Farmers Market Advocate of the Year. Donovan currently leads the Farmers Market Research Project at WSU’s Small Farms Program, analyzing data which will contribute to the local and national discourse on the success of farmers markets. Whether managing the regional Heifer Project, updating the WSDA Green Book, facilitating sessions for women farmers, or teaching poultry processing workshops, Colleen has a wealth of knowledge on food systems that she shares freely in an upbeat, focused, and inclusive manner. Her dedication and enthusiasm for projects that support small farms is a great benefit to farmers across the state.

Events Calendar

Feb. 11: Women in Agriculture Conference. Women face unique challenges in growing viable businesses in farming and ranching. They also learn differently than men and like to connect with other women farmers in sharing experiences, knowledge, and resources. Keynote addresses will be broadcast to 16 locations across the state; and local presenters have been chosen to address the needs of those regions. Save the date of February 11, 2012, for this wonderful opportunity to learn and grow. If you are interested in attending one of these workshops, please send your contact information to Debra Hansen Kollock at dkollock@wsu.edu and you will be notified of all upcoming news and details. Please type “Women in Ag” in the subject line. Or call (509) 684-2588. [Learn more »](#)



Find more upcoming events on the [Green Times blog »](#)

Masthead

Green Times is archived at <http://organicfarms.wsu.edu/category/green-times/>.

The *Green Times* blog is located at <http://organicfarms.wsu.edu/category/blog/>.

The *Green Times* Event calendar is located at <http://organicfarms.wsu.edu/tag/event/>.

Green Times is edited by Brian Clark and the staff of Marketing, News, and Educational Communications in the WSU College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences. Send news tips, story ideas, and items for the events calendar to the editor at bcclark@wsu.edu.

You may want to subscribe to our other e-newsletters:

- *On Solid Ground* is a bi-weekly, electronic newsletter for the friends and stakeholders of the Washington State University College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS), WSU Extension, and the Agricultural Research Center. Subscribe here: <http://bit.ly/sNFU3c>.
- *Voice of the Vine* is a monthly e-newsletter covering viticulture and enology at Washington State University. Each issue brings you one or two short articles featuring profiles of researchers, students, and alumni working in Washington's world-class wine industry. Subscribe here: <http://bit.ly/aJeDG9>.

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