

Planning for the 2020 grain crop

Variety choice is vital for farmers who are considering the production of grain for whole grain end users. Unfortunately, novice whole grain bakers and pasta-makers tend to ask a farmer to grow the variety most in the news, without appreciating the need for appropriateness to the farmer's location, or the availability of seed.

Farmers need to ask the seed suppliers about the use history for each variety of interest. Also, care is needed to establish that the grower has properly cared for the seed. It should be purely that one variety; it should not contain any contaminating weed seeds or other crop seeds. Preferably it should be certified organic and third party certified by CCIA (California Crop Improvement Association) for example in California.

Those of us selling non-proprietary wheat seed for farmers to continue producing the same variety year after year, and provide a consistent grain for end users, are having a hard time spreading the word that we actually have a selected supply of this alternative non-proprietary seed. See seed suppliers at www.wholegrainconnection.org

Note that we have made name changes on three of the varieties in the Whole Grain Connection seed catalog: **Spanish Spelt** is now known as **Silanes** and **Swiss Spelt** is now known as **Stalden**. We have used place names associated with the origin of each variety. We have done this so that later we shall be able to distinguish them from other useful selections from Spain and Switzerland. The ultimate reference will be the USDA accession number used by the Small Grains Collection at www.ars-grin.gov

Ethiopian Blue Tinge **Emmer** has been corrected to Ethiopian Blue Tinge **Durum**, since it is a free-threshing type. *A true emmer wheat is not free threshing.* As a result, we have made the discovery that there are several more Ethiopian dark purple brown landrace durum varieties available from which to select, in the USDA Small Grains Collection.

California's Northern and Central coastal strip faces the Pacific and is tremendously cooled by the ocean. The fog and light rain during summer, make it an unlikely place to grow the wheat varieties that thrive in the heat of summer in the Central Valleys. Look for up and coming landrace selections of Spanish spelt that have been grown successfully on the California coast for the last several years.

When farmers make an educated choice of a new variety to grow, they sensibly grow just 1 to 2 acres in the first year. The recommended seeding rate is 75 – 100 pounds per acre, and this amount of seed is generally available for a selected variety. In this way farmers can observe the crop produced, having made a relatively small investment in seed and effort. If the crop is successful, they will have a whole season of experience to draw on, there will be enough grain to offer to bakers for trial products, and enough seed for a multi-acre crop the following year. Saved seed (grain) each year will enable the farmer to continue producing, without fear that the variety will disappear from the seed seller's stock, as is often the case with conventional commodity seed.

Farmers using non-proprietary landrace seed need to save at least the amount that was used for seeding in the previous year, as a safeguard against crop loss. Also, it is useful to know that wheat grain performs best for baking after it has been stored for 3-6 months. In other words farmers should expect to accommodate a significant carryover of their wheat crop from year to year.

We are in need of farmers who can certify the purity of the non-proprietary landrace variety they are growing. This can be done using the first-year pure seed grow out. See CCIA website. From then on, if certification in that first year is successful the process can be continued, and the farmer can become a bona fide supplier for that variety.

One real note of caution is to make sure to take on a new variety only after doing some research to make sure it is appropriate. Also, it is better to choose just one variety of grain at a time for such a specialized crop so that the best possible chance is given to avoid contamination with other grains and other varieties. Clean equipment at every stage, clear labelling and good recordkeeping are essential. Remember how hard won, has been this seed!