

# Growing Grain on a Small Farm

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In the last century, small farms grew grain for their homesteading needs and livestock feed, but much of small-scale production knowledge and infrastructure has been lost. High feed costs, desire for self-sufficiency and enterprise diversity have led to renewed interest in small-scale grain production. "Growing Grains on a Small Farm" assists producers in reclaiming lost knowledge and appropriately scaled equipment, and also information on new disease – resistant varieties suitable for organic and low-input production.

**Situation** – Many farming communities in the US have lost their ability to produce and process grain. For example, in Oregon eighty years ago, 41 varieties of wheat were grown on a million acres. Small farms grew wheat. Today, there is much less wheat, and what is grown is mostly produced on the large commodity scale, such as the bigger farms in the Klamath basin. Wheat is still Oregon's fifth largest commodity crop, but 85% of it is exported, mostly to Pacific Rim countries. In Southwest Oregon, there are more bakers than wheat growers. Artisan bakers are eager to purchase locally produced wheat. One challenge for organic growers is the misconception that in order to achieve high protein levels in wheat suitable for artisan breads, a farmer must apply commercial nitrogen fertilizer.



**Program content and delivery methods-** January through October, 2010 we held a series of six classes on producing grains on a small farm. The course material included demonstration of equipment, production techniques for each phase of the growing season (variety selection, field prep, seeding, harvesting), as well as marketing networks and equipment-sharing cooperatives. The first class brought together brewers and bakers with farmers. The panel comprised of bakers, brewers, a chef, and representatives from the local flourmill talked about pricing, quality control, storage, and other potential obstacles. The classes that followed each took place on local farms during the growing season. In addition, there was a field trial component whereby three producers were contracted to grow different wheat varieties (heritage and modern). The Wheat Lab in Portland analyzed the grain for protein, ash, and falling numbers. Data will contribute to a fact sheet publishing the results of the trial.



**Conclusions** - As a result of the class, seven producers plan to grow grain for the first time next season; four producers are expanding their grain operations and are collaborating with others in an equipment-sharing working group facilitated by Small Farms. This group will continue to meet with assistance from Small Farms and form a LLC to reduce costs and share production equipment. Another producer has made enough contacts within the class participant group to start a custom field prep and combining service. Based on our experience in Southern Oregon, producers are anxious for support and knowledge to begin or expand small-scale grain production and "Growing Grain on a Small Farm" would be an important addition to Extension programming in many other regions.