

Wheat Farmer Sells Direct Through CSA

Selling vegetables, fruit and even meat through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares is common. Selling grain that way is a bit more unusual.

Brooke Lucy and her husband, Sam, provide customers with a variety of whole grains, milled flours and mixes for monthly delivery. They also sell wholesale in minimum orders of a ton or 150 cases of product.

"We let our customers mix and match what they want from month to month," says Brooke Lucy. "In winter months more hot cereal goes out the door."

In addition to the whole and milled grains, the Lucy's offer a biscuit mix, an Einka and French lentil mix, pancake and waffle mixes, and a cereal blend. They also offer local honey, fruit syrups and spreads. Customers can order from 4 different CSA options that are shipped for either 4 or 6 months. This includes the Simple Share, which is any 3 pre-packaged products between 1 and 2 lbs. each for \$30 per month. The Run of the Mill Share is any 5 pre-packaged, 1 to 2-lb. products per month for \$40 per month. Baker Shares each receive 4 prepackaged whole grain flour items ranging from 4 to 4 1/2-lbs. for

\$55 per month. Family Shares, offering 4 to 5-lb. packages of all products, not just whole grains, are a recently added option.

"We heard from larger families who wanted more product," says Lucy. "Families of 5 to 6 people go through a 5-lb. package in a month."

Lucy and her husband describe Bluebird Grain Farms as "plow-to-package." They grow the grains on their Methow Valley farm at the east end of the Cascades in Washington State. At harvest, the grains are stored in wooden granaries that absorb extra moisture. Grains are also milled on the farm using a hammer mill to produce consistent whole grain flour. Getting to their current place has taken time.

"Growing is relatively easy, but processing is a challenge," says Lucy. "All the grains we grow are in the hull, their natural evolutionary state. It was easy to find a dehuller, but it was only one part of the system. We needed appropriately sized cleaning equipment as well as our mill."

The grains raised include Emmer Farro (an ancient ancestor of wheat) and Einca Farro (Einkorn wheat, a precursor to Emmer). They also grow Methow Hard Red spring wheat (an open pollinated wheat originating in Canada



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100 years ago), Pasayten Hard White (open pollinated Washington variety, farm-bred in the 1950's) and Tetra Pectas, an eastern Washington-bred, unique and rare variety of rye.

"We've been expanding from the first few years and refining our systems," says Lucy. "In addition to the grains we grow, we purchase wild rice and lentils from other farmers for use in blends and also some ingredients for our pancake mixes."

Adding the Einkorn, trademarked Einka, was a challenge. They started out with a very small amount of seed and grew it out. "It took about 10 years to build our seed stock up," says Lucy. "We are one of a few growers who sell the grain direct."

She adds that sales success is largely dependent on the internet. They have had a website for about 10 years, redesigning and launching a new one a year ago.

"It is critical to have the online interface when you are so small and rely on an educated consumer," says Lucy. "It provides a good platform for educating people on what we are doing and a way for people to find us. Anyone can order from us, and we ship all over the U.S. and Canada."

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He's Tapping The Market For "Microgreens"

By Klaire Howerton

When most people think of growing greens, they tend to think of large leafed plants such as spinach or Swiss chard. But James Boosey of Blue Heron Farm in Marshfield, Mo., wanted to produce a unique product that would stand out. So he decided to think small.

Microgreens are vegetable shoots that are harvested for use just after the first leaves have developed. Once James began selling his microgreens at a local farmers market, numerous restaurants approached him. The project "snowballed," according to James and now, he says, "It's growing day to day." Blue Heron Farm now sells microgreens to 11 restaurants in their area, 3 health food stores, a corporate grocery store, and at their local farmers market.

One thing that really makes Blue Heron Farm's microgreens stand out is how they are grown. Traditional microgreens are grown hydroponically, and cut before selling. Blue Heron Farm's microgreen seeds are direct sown very densely, at a rate of 100 starts per 4-in. sq. area, in a specially formulated growing medium that increases the shelf life. James also notes that since the greens are growing in "dirt", a plant's optimum growing environment,

the end product has a better, richer flavor than those grown hydroponically. Blue Heron Farm uses organic practices to grow their microgreens, and they only plant heirloom, non-GMO varieties of seed from trusted seed companies. "We look to buy the highest quality seed you can buy," James says.

Blue Heron Farm's microgreen growing medium is hand mixed by James and contains coconut fiber, peat moss, vermiculite, and perlite. This custom mix is designed to give the growing microgreens the proper acidity and maximum nutrients, as well as to retain water. There is another reason Blue Heron Farm uses a custom growing medium instead of traditional potting soil - it's much cleaner. Whereas traditional potting soil is wet, heavy and dirty, Blue Heron Farm's mix keeps the product much cleaner - a big plus for chefs who need to quickly and efficiently snip off a handful of greens to garnish a plate that is ready to be served.

The microgreens at Blue Heron Farm are propagated in an indoor growing room with windows and grow lights. The environment in the growing room must be constantly monitored and adjusted in order to achieve adequate production - "You have to control the conditions precisely to the best of your



Microgreens at Blue Heron Farm are propagated in an indoor growing room with windows and grow lights. Harvest takes place just after the first leaves have developed.

ability," says James. Humidity is especially important. During the early stages of germination, the growing room needs to be kept at 80 percent humidity. But once the microgreens are in a more developed stage of growth, the humidity must be reduced to below 50 percent, or mold and rot can occur. James uses misters and a thermostat to regulate the humidity.

The possibilities for different varieties of microgreens are almost endless. For retail purposes, James and his family grow brassica mixes, a peppery mix of mustard, arugula,

chives and radish, amaranth and flax, parsley and chives, basil, and pea shoots. James also grows custom microgreen mixes and varieties for chefs, which include everything from popcorn shoots to red veined sorrel. Chefs and retail customers enjoy working with Blue Heron Farm, and James and his family enjoy working with them.

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Got A Product To Sell? Here's One Way To Do It

If you like creating or growing things but you don't like doing the marketing, check out www.GreenLifeCenter.com. Owner Joe Bobier sets up online stores for free and charges a 5 percent commission when items are sold.

"We're unique from other online services in two ways," Bobier explains. "One, it's much cheaper than other systems, and it's a whole lot simpler. Second, we focus on handmade and sustainable products. We don't want items imported from China to resell."

After about a year of building and testing the site, the West Virginia-based company

officially went online just before Christmas. Bobier has helped a variety of vendors set up store sites selling everything from jewelry and antiques to homemade lip balms and heirloom garden seeds.

After signing up to be a member, popup messages guide vendors through the process of uploading photos, inputting information about themselves and their products, and setting up pricing and shipping. A private merchant account accepts credit cards to automatically pay the vendor and the GreenLifeCenter commission. Bobier, a technology engineer, is also available to answer questions.

"My wife and I live on a farm and raise Katahdin sheep. We go to a lot of fairs and farmers markets. We noticed how many talented people there were selling everything from quilts to meat to furniture," Bobier says. "What they have in common is that they are good at producing and bad at marketing. We want to create easy access to retail markets by doing all the legwork."

In addition to helping vendors set up online stores, the website provides extra exposure by randomly featuring vendors on the home page. Bobier also includes Google search advertising, and offers packages for Google online search engine advertising.

"We focus on sustainability," Bobier says, noting he hopes to attract vendors selling produce, meat, milk and other products that can be shipped in boxes he can provide.

"As a member you have access to educational videos, blogs, experts and a support structure for a sustainable lifestyle, plus discounts from other vendors," he adds.

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