

Triticale Catches On For Bakers, Breweries And Distilleries

Makers of beer, ale, spirits and bread in the Pacific Northwest have a new flavor available to them thanks to the triticale grown by a Washington family. Success with a “new” crop is all about smart marketing, added value, and personal connections, according to James and Rena Wahl and their children, Dane and Maya.

The journey began when James Wahl switched from growing wheat to growing triticale for a seed contract and found it was a good alternative. Triticale is a blend of Durham wheat and rye that is high in protein and lysine, so it is often used as feed for poultry and hogs.

After becoming friends with a local maltster, it occurred to Wahl that since both malted rye and wheat are used in beers, triticale might be good, too. So he took some to have malted (a process that includes steeping the grain till germination begins and then drying it). The maltster made beer with it, and it was good, Wahl says.

“I put the malted triticale in Ziploc bags and knocked on brewery and distillery doors leaving homemade business cards,” says Wahl, a former Seattle commercial photographer.

The outreach worked, and he found customers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington states. Including triticale (25 to 38 percent) adds a floral, spicy finish to beverages. Because it is more complex than barley it also adds richness to the spirits being made.

Wahl, with the help of his daughter’s social media writing, is building the farm business. MJW Grain Inc. is expanding into other markets, including bread bakers and potentially a power bar company.

“Our farm grows 3,000 acres of crops, and I’m hoping that 20 percent sells as value-added,” Wahl says. That can net 100 to 200 percent of market prices on average with the current low market prices. With the business just getting started, Wahl says he is willing to sell triticale and malted triticale one bag at a time or deliver it himself with



James and Rena Wahl are building a farm-business based on growing triticale. It’s a blend of Durham wheat and rye that’s high in protein and lysine.

a 2-ton truck to customers in the region.

Which leads to another benefit of his value-added market.

“Before, our crop went to make Ramen noodles. I didn’t like the disconnect when it left the farm. I wanted to know my end users and work with artisan products,” Wahl says. “Now clients have turned into friends, and we are interacting with their families, and there is something rewarding about that.”

In addition to local sales to businesses, Wahl sells to a grower who uses triticale to grow mushrooms. And, he is developing a market shipping larger tonnage by truck to places such as New Orleans.

With his children part of the operation, the farm is in its fifth generation, and Wahl says finding a way to keep it sustainable is important. Developing a value-added market with personal relationships is a bonus.

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Tea is usually grown in the tropics, but Angela Macke successfully grows and sells it on her 70-acre farm in Michigan.



Growing Tea In Michigan

Tea has a variety of health benefits from lowering bad cholesterol to weight loss and anti-aging. It’s usually grown in the tropics but we recently heard about a successful U.S. tea grower in Michigan.

“Tea loves good drainage and Leelanau County has some of the most impressive sand dunes in the world,” says Angela Macke, owner of the business and 70-acre farm where she grows tea. “We use finely ground red pine bark mixed with sand and compost to successfully germinate many tea seedlings each year and to nourish our established plants.”

Her “Magical Biodynamic” compost is one of the agricultural practices she uses to make her farm Certified Demeter Biodynamic - the only tea farm with that certification in North America. The former critical care nurse explains it is a step beyond organic certification.

“A Demeter Biodynamic farm organism always gives back more to the earth than it takes - the inputs are from the farm. It is considered the very highest standard for commercially grown food in the world,” Macke says. The Lunar calendar, homeopathic remedies for compost, farm-made foliar sprays, and other practices are used for the certification.

“Tea is the most labor-intensive crop known to mankind,” she says, and faithful customers appreciate that and the fact that

Light of Day Organics tea is not being harvested by underpaid foreign workers. Customers are willing to pay the price to buy a domestic certified product, with a tin of tea ranging between \$19 to \$40 (40 to 100 servings depending on ounces and ingredients).

Light of Day also teaches extensively about Matcha green tea, an imported product since its beginnings back in 2004. Matcha is a shade-grown green tea product that is highly nutritious, loaded with anti-oxidants and has a long history of use by monks and the Samurai. The Michigan company offers the product in loose powdered form and more recently added pharmaceutical grade, U.S.-made vegan capsules in straight form or combined with turmeric for even more anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory action.

“We have a strong local following in our retail store each weekend as customers come back for that personalized interaction that is becoming harder to find these days. We’re open six days a week in the summer,” Macke says.

The business’s website has videos and information about the farm and tea.

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She Makes, Sells Products From Wild Chaga Mushrooms

It took Lynnel Anderson 6 mos. to find her first Chaga mushroom. Five years later she has developed an eye for finding the mushroom that looks like a lump of burnt charcoal on birch trees. Passionate about the benefits of the mushroom, the Pillager, Minn., entrepreneur has also developed a business processing Chaga into a tincture and as an ingredient in lotions, soaps and balms.

For centuries, Chaga has been considered a medicinal mushroom in Russian and Eastern European folk medicine. The mushroom starts to grow when a limb breaks off or the tree sustains damage. Spores grow, pulling nutrients from the tree. The inside of the mushroom is bright orange. The mushrooms Anderson collects are typically the size of a cantaloupe, about 6 or 7 lbs., though she once harvested one that was 18 lbs.

Anderson became intrigued with Chaga after taking a class on edible Minnesota mushrooms. When she finally found them, she and family members used Chaga to make tea for its healthful properties high in antioxidants, including betulinic acid and beta glucans. To concentrate the

benefits, she learned how to make tincture, a long process that involves chopping, alcohol extraction, cooking in distilled water, freezing, more cooking and finally straining and bottling. She is licensed to collect, process the Chaga in a certified kitchen, and sell the tincture and other products.

Anderson harvests most of the Chaga in the winter from birch trees.

“In Minnesota a license from the Department of Agriculture is required to harvest and sell Chaga. I won’t buy Chaga from another person because I have to be the only one that handles it. Unfortunately people are harvesting it in hopes of selling it without a license,” she says, noting it’s important to only buy products from people who are licensed.

She doesn’t make any claims about Chaga, and suggests customers do their own research. Many of them have skin conditions, cancer or tick-related diseases and say they find relief from Chaga’s vitamin D-3, and anti-inflammatory and analgesic qualities. Because Chaga is an adaptogen, it is nontoxic and doesn’t interfere with traditional medications.

However, Anderson cautions that people



with some health conditions should not use Chaga in any form because it is a blood sugar stabilizer. Conditions include diabetes and anyone who suffers from a glucose or metabolism disorder or is taking an immune suppressant drug.

Anderson and her family take the tincture daily for a sense of well being and to boost immunity. She sells the tincture for \$22 for 2

The Chaga mushroom grows on birch trees and looks like a lump of burnt charcoal. Lynnel Anderson has developed a business processing Chaga into a tincture and as an ingredient in lotions, soaps and balms.



oz., and has it in about a dozen local stores. “A lot of people sell the tea, but I can help more people (with tincture) than selling it as tea,” she says.

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