

Heritage Grains Catching On Fast, Says Grower

A simple conversation with a friend about producing flour from heritage varieties of grain resulted in Steve Sossaman, Queen Creek, Arizona, creating a whole new business based on ancient grains. Along the way he had to figure out how to grow, harvest, and market his unique products to breweries, distilleries and restaurants. He also sells online to consumers and has an on-farm event center to host agri-tourists.

"My friend, Jeff Zimmerman, wanted to revive the Hayden Mill name – a historic local mill – and process grain like it would have been milled when Hayden was started in 1868," recalls Sossaman. "No one had done anything like this before, and there was no 3-ring binder of instructions to pull off the shelf. We are still adjusting and finding our way today."

Zimmerman and Sossaman ended up going down a path they could never have imagined. The first step was to find seed sources for and information on heritage grains like White Sonora (1700's), Red Fife (1840), Emmer (4,000 B.C.), Einkorn (9,000 B.C.) and more.

"The biggest challenge was the lack of information on these old grains," says Sossaman, a fifth generation Arizona grower of grain and other crops. "We did multiple seeding rate and fertility trials on the farm. We might find enough seed in a variety to plant 20 acres or so the first year. It often takes 3 years to grow out enough to mill."

At the same time, the 2 collaborators were searching for grain cleaning and milling equipment that fit the operation.

"A lot of people grow grain, but getting it to food-grade quality is a big challenge," says Sossaman. "We sought out experts and pieced together cleaning equipment from the U.S., Canada, Japan and the Netherlands. The guy who helped us put it all together was from Canada."

Sossaman emphasizes the importance of building a milling operation on-farm if possible. He tells about a small malting operation he knows about that built off the farm. Taxes were twice what they would have been on-farm.

Once equipment was in place, Hayden Mills began producing and marketing flour and other grain products. As production expanded, Sossaman began marketing grain to other buyers. This took off when his son-in-law joined the business. He and Sossaman's 3 daughters all had food service experience.

His son-in-law's contacts in food service, brewing and distilling expanded their market for grains into those areas.

"Today, half our grain goes into those markets and half into milling," says Sossaman.

He notes that his soils and hot dry climate are ideal for many of the grains that originated in similar conditions in the Middle East. As his markets have expanded, he is now working with others, such as the Yavapai Apache Nation in northern Arizona.

"The Nature Conservancy was working with them to introduce crops that used less water, including barley," says Sossaman. "I suggested they try Gazelle Rye, a heritage



Steve Sossaman in Arizona is bringing back ancient heritage grains. He built a milling operation to produce and market specialty grain products.

variety, and it turned out fantastic. Next year they will double the acreage. It gives us a source for a grain that doesn't do as well here."

Sossaman is all about collaborating and working with others. One group he recommends getting to know is regulators. "You have to work with them, so make friends," he says. "We spent several years pioneering agritainment in our community and worked to make it a zoning category. We helped write the regulations so they wouldn't require asphalt and concrete like on commercial sites. Instead, they allow older buildings that are more common in an agricultural landscape."

He is equally open about sharing information. The company website is filled

with videos and information on how his business operates.

Helping people also means sharing what not to do. "If we can steer you to the right suppliers or right variety, we want to do it," he says. "Our business model is to be open to anyone who wants to learn the business. We have lots of people tour the farm. We love to help people go down this road."

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Chicken Feeder Makes Chore Time Easy

Romie Holl built his chicken feeder to solve a problem he had after putting his chickens and goats in the same pen. The goats were eating the chicken feed. By putting feed in a plastic barrel with 3-in. pvc 90-degree elbows installed at the bottom, only the chickens can poke their heads into the barrel to eat. In addition, Holl appreciates the convenience of filling the feeder every 2 or 3 weeks instead of daily.

"Regular size chickens have no problem reaching in," he says, noting the elbows may be too long for small breeds.

He set a 55-gal. plastic barrel on the ground and marked 6 holes around the bottom by placing the elbow on a piece of 2 by 4 next to the barrel and drawing around the end. That creates a 1 1/2-in. space for the grain below the feeder opening. He cut the holes with a hole saw and pushed the male end through the hole from the inside, leaving about 1 1/2-in. protruding on the outside of the barrel and the end inside the barrel facing downward. Once he knew how everything would fit, he caulked

around each elbow with 100 percent silicone caulking inside and outside the barrel.

After letting it dry for a day, Holl poured 20 gal. of feed into the barrel to test it. Initially, he dropped some grain on the ground around the elbow and inside the opening.

"It didn't take long for the chickens to figure it out," he says. "The feeder has worked well for 3 1/2 years."

To help grain flow toward the feeder openings, he pop-riveted a cone made of 18-in. wide flashing and placed it in inside the barrel. Besides having a tight lid, the feeder is under a lean-to, and he's never had issues with rain getting in the feeder holes. As a precaution he drilled a few small pinholes in the bottom of the barrel in case moisture gets inside. He makes sure to keep the barrel full enough so it is too heavy for the goats to knock over.

Having the chickens, goats and currently one pig in the same pen works out well, Holl notes. Chickens eat the flies attracted to the feces, and the pig lets the chickens sleep on



Holl installed 3-in. pvc 90-degree elbows at the bottom of a 55-gal. plastic barrel, where only his chickens can poke their heads in to eat.

top of him.

Holl, Wis. (romieh66@yahoo.com).

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Cone Makes Log Skidding Easier

A poly log skidding cone from Northern Tool (www.northerntool.com) keeps logs from getting hung up on roots, stumps or other trees when being winched out of the woods. Made of high-performance polymer plastic, the 20-in. dia. cone is available by itself (\$159) or as part of a kit (\$519).

The kit includes a 164-ft. double braid polyester rope, a 6-ft. polyester sling, an open face corner block, an automatic rope release, 5/16-in. grab hook with latch, 1/4-in. by 7-in. choker chain, and pulling plate. It also includes a storage bag to keep everything together.



Operator attaches winching rope as close as possible to cone to hold it tightly in place while skidding logs.

Plastic Pipe Keeps Wheel Hub Dust Covers Dent-Free

"I may be 91 years old but I haven't quit thinking," says W.A. Gibbs, who uses short pieces of plastic pipe to protect the flimsy metal dust caps on the front wheels of his 1974 Deere 1530 tractor.

"The dust caps kept coming off while I was doing bush hogging work," says Gibbs. "The tractor's original cast iron dust caps had been replaced long ago, and now all that's available are flimsy metal ones. Whenever the metal caps would work loose, I would hammer them back on and dent them all up. I tried using a rubber hammer, but they'd still

get scratched and dented."

His solution was to cut a 2-in. dia. plastic pipe to a 3-in. length and place one end on the cap, then use a 3-lb. steel hammer to hit the other end "good and firm".

"I'm amazed how well this idea works. The dust cap gets knocked back into place and won't even have a scratch on it," says Gibbs.

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