

Grand Central Baking transitions to sustainable flour supply

Shepherd's Grain is renowned for sustainable practices

by *Sustainable Food News*
September 1, 2009

Grand Central Bakery, the Pacific Northwest's premier artisan bakery, said Tuesday it is sourcing all of its bulk white flour locally from Shepherd's Grain, a group of eastern Washington wheat farmers committed to no-till farming and direct seed planting, and certified as sustainable by Food Alliance.

In addition to supporting progressive farming techniques that protect the environment, the decision to switch to Northwest-grown, sustainably produced Shepherd's Grain flour allows Grand Central to more closely control the quality of their main ingredient, flour.

Working directly with the farmers' cooperative gives the bakers the opportunity to communicate with the farmers who grow the wheat and the millers who turn it in to flour.

Beginning this month, a railcar loaded with 200,000 pounds of freshly milled flour will arrive each month to Grand Central Bakery, direct from the mill in Spokane.

"Our commitment to creating the best bread on the market begins with the quality of our ingredients," said Ben Davis, co-owner of Grand Central Baking. "Using quality flour which meets our specifications is crucial for our success. The large scale purchase of locally grown, sustainably produced raw ingredients also helps to further our goal of protecting the environment and supporting our local farmers and the Northwest economy."

Sourcing a non-commodity, single supplier for their flour, Grand Central evaluated not only the quality of the end baked good and each supplier's potential to provide a custom product, but also their growing and processing practices, as well as the flour supplier's proximity to Grand Central's Pacific Northwest locations.

Shepherd's Grain stood out from the rest, in part due to the national notoriety the farmer-owned company has earned for its commitment to sustainable agricultural practices and top-quality grain products, including high-gluten flour, which is in great demand by artisan bakers, according to Grand Central.

While Shepherd's Grain's 33 farmers consider themselves "dirt farmers," first and foremost the growers are all Food Alliance certified food producers.

Their passion for the land is shown in the importance they place on caring for the fragile topsoils of the Columbia Plateau through implementation of sustainable growing practices, including direct seeding.

The direct seeding method helps to build the health of the soil, reduce erosion, and increase carbon retention while using less fossil fuel for preparation and maintenance of the fields.

"We're proud of the fact that Grand Central, one of the leading artisan bakers in the Northwest, has chosen to use our product exclusively and support our efforts," says Karl Kupers, co-founder of Shepherd's Grain. "Clearly, our organizations share the goal of protecting our resources for the next generation while providing the best-quality products on the market."

