

## No-till beans appeal to locavores

### *Company tours suppliers to see production in action*

By RENE FEATHERSTONE For the Capital Press

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ROYAL CITY, Wash. -- The sun stood hot and high over the Royal Slope when Tom Grebb pushed his fingers into a barely visible line of dirt on an irrigation circle, digging for bean seed.

"There is one," he said, holding it up for his 28 visitors to see. "It's sprouted."

Grebb, owner of Haricot Farms and Central Bean in Quincy, pointed to the seed treatment dye and explained that soil tests had shown a high population of wireworms in this field. He went on to highlight benefits of no-till farming. It's promoted as a "sustainable" practice by Food Alliance, certifier of his farm and the conditioning plant where the tour was soon headed.

The group, made up of employees of Sound Bites, had a close connection to the field. Sound Bites is a "fiercely local" company that produces hummus, crackers and chimichurri sauce, said Rich Hines, who owns Sound Bites in Tacoma, Wash., with Stephen McConkey. Hines arranged the tour for his employees and his marketing firm. Their first stop was a vineyard and a grapeseed oil pressing facility in the Yakima Valley. Then they saw a Royal City field of grain that will be milled for the company's flour.

Grebb, whose field was just down the road, supplies the chickpeas for the hummus.

"We're so excited to meet with the producers, to walk the land," Hines said. The range of environmental considerations that his suppliers incorporate in raising their crops stood out for him.

"We're a strictly urban audience. It's hard to take in everything in one day," he said. "We need to come back."

Locals see Grebb as an innovator because of his no-till approach. The practice has gained traction in Washington dryland wheat ground susceptible to erosion, but no-till on irrigated fields was unheard of in the basin until about a decade ago.

"Karl Kupers, a wheat farmer from Harrington, was farming Great Northern beans on land down here by Quincy," Grebb said. Kupers' rented acres were heavy with sod in the wake of grass seed production, but instead of plowing Kupers used his no-till planter.



*Lena Hardt/For the Capital Press*  
Tom Grebb, owner of Haricot Farms and Central Bean in Quincy, Wash., talks about the benefits of no-till farming.

"I thought what Karl was trying to do was the craziest thing," Grebb said. "I thought his crop would never grow. But his no-till planter sliced right through that sod. He'd sprayed the grass out before he planted, and the decaying roots retained water really well."  
Grebb gave no-till a try in 2003 and found it worked.

Other growers in the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project have paid heed to Grebb's no-till success, and every year a few more circles from Mattawa to Quincy get planted with the no-till drill that Grebb purchased. Several other area growers have now invested in a no-till drill for use on irrigated acres.

The direct-marketing thrust has made Grebb a promoter at farmers' markets and other events.

"I just stood there and told them that I was the farmer of the beans, and people thought that was neat," he said. "People want to identify where the food comes from."

He also shares his vision of sustainable ag with visitors such as the Sound Bites group.

"Concerns over global warming have made people more aware of the food miles," Grebb said. "The eat-local trend has become a big factor."

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