

# Farmers visit C-Street to educate students on food growing practices

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Last Thursday at noon, a wheat farmer briefly relocated to C-Street as part of Bon Appétit's "Meet Your Farmer" event.

The meet-and-greet with the farmers who grow Seattle University's food was held as part of Bon Appétit's "Farm to Fork" initiative, which aims to better educate students and faculty about where their food comes from.

Programs like this, as well as "Low-Carbon Diet," helped Bon Appétit receive the number two score out of 118 schools in the food category of a recent ranking of "green" schools published by the Sierra Club.

On Thursday, the farmer in attendance was Fred Fleming. As a co-founder of Shepherd's Grain, Fleming has contributed to the global food revolution of the 21st century. He is responsible for 100 percent of the flour that Bon Appétit uses in its campus eateries. That means over 1,500 pounds of flour this week, next week and the week after.



Fleming's company now oversees 33 farmers, mostly in Eastern Washington, who are all devoted to sustainable farming practices. His farm in the Palouse Valley has been practicing no-till farming for two generations. Since starting the company in 1999, he has grown the company from just a few farms with a few clients to a major supplier of quality no-till grain. Shepherd's Grain has supplied Bon Appétit with all of its wheat for nearly a decade and has benefitted from having such a large client devoted to environmental sustainability.

Fleming's farms, although not organic, are certified as no-till by the Food Alliance. No-till farming preserves the soil much more than typical farming practices, which disturb the soil with deep tractor equipment. No-till farming involves more work because the farmer must directly plant the seed into the soil without overturning it and destroying the nutrients.

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Fred Fleming, right, co-founder of Shepherd's Grain, speaks with students about the food provided to Seattle University eateries during the Meet Your Farmer event at C-Street Friday Oct. 7.

Unfortunately, this sustainable practice is often overlooked by the average customer when a hot-button word like "organic" is in the description. But according to Fleming, in the case of wheat, organic is much less important than conservative tillage. He lightly sprays the crops with herbicides, because the increased soil health supports the growth of more weeds. Fleming attributes the health of his land to his conservative farming programs, such as direct seeding and crop rotation.

Shannon Wilson, executive chef at C-Street, recently visited the farms and flour mills in Spokane as part of Bon Appétit's educational initiative.

"It was really amazing being able to see where the wheat comes from, and to see how much love they put into [their crops]," said Wilson. "Each bag of flour that comes out the processing plant in Spokane is tagged with a code that shows which family farm in Fleming's organization it came from, so anyone can see where their food was grown."

This quality, however, comes at a cost. A few students have voiced their concern of over-pricing at campus eateries.

"I understand that [Bon Appétit] is trying to use true-cost pricing," said sophomore Max Snyder, "but sometimes [the food prices] seem too high."

Shepherd's Grain is just one of many food producers Bon Appétit sources from that is practicing sustainable farming, which is more expensive than conventional practices. Fortunately, it's a price that most students seem happy to pay.

"Students really appreciate all the green options we offer here at C-Street," said Café Manager Johan Austneberg. "It's great when they come up to [employees] and thank us for the job we are doing." Bon Appétit is dedicated to sourcing local and sustainable foods. According to the Sierra Club's analysis, 45 percent of food on campus comes from within 100 miles. This figure does not include the wheat provided by Shepherd's Grain, because all of Shepherd's Grain's farms in Eastern Washington are just beyond the 100-mile radius.

Shepherd's Grain and Bon Appétit have been doing business together for eight years now, and according to Fleming, they have had a very positive relationship.

"They are a pioneer in the food service industry, and they're wonderful to work with...every year, [Bon Appétit] comes visit our farms to educate their staff about where the food comes from. They truly are blazing trails."

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