

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Michael Davis, Cornell Baker Research Farm, 518-963-7492
Sam Sherman, Champlain Valley Milling, 518-962-4711
Anita Deming, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Essex County, 518-962-4810

Regional Processor Wants Winter Wheat: NNY Ag Development Program Research Can Help Growers Meet Demand; Fact Sheets Now Online

Northern New York Agricultural Development Program research on organic production of winter wheat is proving valuable to a North Country grower-processor.

Sam Sherman of Champlain Valley Milling, Westport, NY, currently processes his own organically-grown winter wheat and buys the grain from the Upper Midwest, Western US, Saskatchewan, and two Northern New York farms. He hopes other farmers in Northern New York will soon begin growing the crop.

“Sales of organic flours are growing 15 to 20 percent annually. We could use 6,000 acres’ worth of winter wheat grown in Northern New York,” Sherman says.

At the Cornell Research Farm at Willsboro, Farm Manager Michael Davis has been conducting long-term organic trials of winter wheat with Northern New York Agricultural Development Program funding. The wheat is planted in August and harvested in July.

“Winter wheat can be well suited to the Northern New York growing conditions. We generally test varieties over a three-to-five year period to evaluate how well they will respond year after year in varying weather conditions,” Davis says. “It is also essential that varieties selected for production are tested for the potential to meet the specific needs of specialty markets.”

Regional Processor Wants Winter Wheat: NNY Ag Development Program 2 of 2
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Anita Deming, director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Essex County, says hard white winter wheat in addition to meeting market demand is itself good for the environment.

“The winter wheat holds nutrients in the soil over winter and helps decrease erosion. Organic wheat flour is in demand by processors as organic products are easier to market. The hard white high gluten wheat alternative to red spring wheat produces bread that is high in fiber, but white. Our marketing people believe that the white variety will improve consumption of whole wheat bread by kids thereby improving their nutrition,” she says.

An independent lab evaluates the Willsboro research farm’s harvested grain for protein levels and gluten strength for home baking and commercial mixing. Different varieties of winter wheat are processed into flours for breads, pastries, cookies, and cakes.

Meanwhile back at Champlain Valley Milling, Sam Sherman is adding grain bins as well as bulk flour storage and anticipates beginning a more concentrated campaign to interest regional farmers in growing winter wheat for his mill.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program 2004 Small Grains Variety Trials report for 29 varieties of winter wheat and 16 varieties of spring wheat is available from Cornell Cooperative Extension and is online at www.nnyagdev.org. An Organic Field Crop Rotation for NNY Spring and Winter Wheat Fact Sheet is also online.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is a farmer-driven research and education program specific to Essex, Clinton, Franklin, St. Lawrence, Lewis and Jefferson counties. For more information, visit www.nnyagdev.org or contact Board

Chairs Joe Giroux, Plattsburgh, 518-563-7523 or Jon Greenwood, Canton, 315-386-3231,
or call Dave Smith at Cornell University at 607-255-7286. # # #