

Guar Grows Well On Dryland Farms

Texas farmer Randy Loveless says that Guar, a legume grown primarily in India and Pakistan, is a good crop for his dryland farm. "It's easy to grow, the inputs are low and it really helps the soil. Our yield was 900 lbs. per acre and I plan to grow it again next year."

Loveless, along with several other Texas and Oklahoma farmers, raised about 100,000 acres of the legume in 2017. Guar has expanded in the U.S. because it's a key ingredient in fracking for the oil industry. When guar powder is added to water it turns into a thick gel that helps with deep drilling. It's also used in food, feed, and other industrial products.

Loveless says guar is valuable in rotation with cotton or sorghum because it's extremely drought tolerant and fixes nitrogen. Guar plants have a long taproot

and do well in fertile, medium-textured and sandy loam soils. The plant produces seed pods that are harvested by a combine.

Guar Resources LLC of Brownfield, Texas is the only USA-based "beans-to-powder" source for guar products. General Manager Alex Muraviyov says the company's guar protein is a high quality dairy animal supplement and guar hulls are blended into feed for fiber and energy.

Guar Resources licenses seed to local growers and buys the field production back under contract. In 2016 they purchased about 20 million lbs. and hope to increase that amount in 2017.

Texas agronomist Calvin Trostle says that even though guar gum prices are down because of low crude oil prices, guar is still a good fit for dryland producers because it doesn't cost a lot to produce and it improves



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the soil for future crops.

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Heritage Grains Helped Them Stand Out From The Crowd

Kasey White and Jeff Broadie built their Lonesome Whistle Farm business by specializing in heritage varieties of edible beans, grain and corn. It has helped them stand out in a marketplace filled with standard vegetables, fruit and cut flower producers. It also gives them year-round products to market.

"We wanted something we could sell throughout the year to spread out our risk," says White. "We can grow enough Dakota Black popcorn in one year for 2 years of marketing."

They sell their niche products at farmer's markets in Eugene, Portland, Corvallis and Bend, Ore. They also sell their crops direct to 50 families and offer wholesale prices to larger buyers. Customers can also order from their website.

"We are one of a few in the area doing popcorn, grain and beans," says White. "We are unique."

The Dakota Black popcorn pops white with a black hull. It also makes attractive corn flour and has built a following among restaurants, as well as their popcorn loving customers.

Originally a small amount was obtained from Seed Savers Exchange (www.seedsavers.org). White and Broadie grew it out, tried it, loved it and multiplied the seed until they had enough to start selling it. They now sell about 7,000 lbs. a year with a retail price of \$6 per pound. It is a pattern they have followed with other grains and beans.

Lonesome Whistle doesn't just sell the raw products. They also sell whole grain flours, polenta, corn flour and rolled oats.

If the seed business wasn't unique enough as it is, White also added Cultivation Jewelry, earrings she makes from heirloom beans.

Lonesome Whistle also sells seed for open-pollinated vegetables, flowers, and heritage beans and grain.

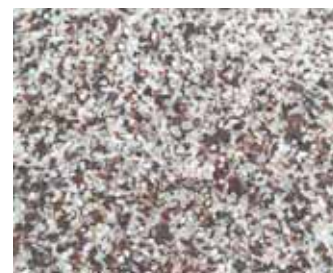
One of their newest products is an English

heirloom wheat. "Sara Kleeger and Andrew Still of Adaptive Seeds (www.adaptiveseeds.com) brought Maris Widgeon wheat back from England and grew it out for a few years before giving us enough for a quarter acre," says White. "We grew out enough to plant 5 acres of it. It is an all-purpose wheat for bread and pastries with a really superior flavor."

White says the heritage wheat grows tall and stands up well. It was the source of straw used to thatch roofs in England. Currently they flail the straw back into the soil. However, given Lonesome Whistle's ability to maximize market opportunity, they may find a way to market their straw just as they did with their popcorn.

"We bought a small commercial popcorn popper and set it up at our stand," says White. "We can sell several hundred dollars worth of fresh popped corn, and people get a chance to taste the product."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup,



Lonesome Whistle Farm specializes in heritage varieties of edible beans, grain and corn.

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Fiber Mill Specializes In Alpaca, Llama Fiber

With the recent opening of a new fiber mill to process alpaca fleeces, alpaca producers may have a shorter wait time for roving or yarn from their animals. Plus, it's a place to get quality advice from alpaca growers who understand fiber and color.

After waits of a year or more to get yarn from their alpaca fleeces, Mitchell and Linda Dickinson of Earleville, Md., decided to purchase equipment and go into business as Painted Sky Alpaca Farm & Fiber Mill.

It's one of the only fiber mills anywhere that's dedicated to processing alpaca and alpaca blends, says Linda. Alpaca is hypoallergenic and does not have the lanolin found in sheep fiber. The need to remove oil and scrub equipment between processing sheep and alpaca is one reason why alpaca can take a long time to process at large mills.

At the farm's mini-mill, the Dickinsons and Linda's sister, Connie Hughes, only process alpaca. Plus, with their understanding of fibers, they offer customers advice on the best yarn types from each fleece.

"We are constantly learning because every fiber is different," Dickinson says. "There are certain formulas you follow, but you have to adjust. Some customers may want bulky yarn, but the fiber doesn't want to be bulky. So we call them and make suggestions."

A key ingredient to making quality yarn is clean fiber. Alpaca owners need to skirt their fleeces (remove vegetation and fiber shorts) prior to sending them to the mill.

"We look at the quality of the fiber, staple length, crimp structure and cleanliness to ensure the fleece will make a nice quality yarn in the desired weight," Dickinson says. Each fleece is tumbled to remove any remaining dirt, vegetable matter and fiber shorts, then washed in 150-degree water. After drying, the fleece is run through a picker.

"It breaks open clumps of fiber and shoots them into a closet, so when you open the door, it looks like a huge 'cloud' of fiber," Dickinson explains. "Then it goes into a fiber separator. It's important to have that with alpaca, because it pulls out thicker guard hairs and only finer fibers pass through to the end."

The thicker hairs are run through one more time to salvage more of the fiber. (Even the coarsest fiber is saved and used to make rug yarn.)

The good fiber goes into a carder to produce a thin strand of roving. For customers who want yarn, the journey continues through a draw frame, then a spinner where a single strand is spun on a spindle. The individual strands are then run through a pleyer to create 2 or 3-ply yarn. It is finished with steam to set the twist.



Painted Sky Alpaca Farm & Fiber Mill is dedicated to processing alpaca and alpaca blends. "About 75 percent of our orders are made into yarn," says Linda Dickinson.

"About 75 percent of our orders are made into yarn, 15 percent roving and 10 percent rug yarn," Dickinson says.

As a retired graphic artist, Dickinson enjoys the creative process of adding color, creating natural blends or suggesting other fiber blends for her customers. Some alpaca fleeces need help to become a quality yarn. For instance, Suri Alpacas have no crimp, which gives elasticity to the yarn, so it is

recommended to blend it with high-grade Merino wool or a Huacaya fleece.

Demand is growing as people discover the mini mill, Dickinson says. "Our current turn around time for orders is 4 to 5 months."

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