

Old Varieties Take Hold On Saskatchewan Farm

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Jim Ternier can help you plant a 400-year-old variety of carrots, fava beans and lettuce from the 1700's, or a variety of squash that Native Americans planted for hundreds of years before Europeans entered the picture. His catalog lists 102 varieties of small grains from all over the world, 50 of which are wheat. Some stretch back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The einkorn wheat he grows is thought to be the oldest wheat still in existence, dating back 10,000 years.

"Most of what we sell are old varieties bred commercially in the 1800's and early 1900's," says Ternier. "Some varieties came from customers who've had them in their families for generations."

Ternier readily admits to stumbling into the seed business. A market gardener some 35 years ago, he started saving seeds from his favorite open-pollinated varieties and selling them during the off season. He put out his first catalog in 1986.

"Seed sales proved more interesting than growing, so I expanded until I was able to stop selling vegetables," says Ternier. "At first I sold to the local market. The majority of our sales are still to surrounding provinces. However, we also sell to the U.S. and have started selling to Europe. More recently we've sent seeds to Japan and Australia."

With 30 to 35 fava and broad bean varieties, Ternier has what he thinks may be the largest private collection. While others may have more grains, what Ternier offers is impressive. Like his vegetable seed business, it developed by accident.

"A wheat weaver asked for some durum varieties. She said they were the best for weaving due to their long, strong stems and

pretty beards," recalls Ternier. "I grew some, offered them in my catalog, and they proved popular. I added more. It took me a decade to realize that some customers were growing them for a food crop, not for decorations."

One of Ternier's early and most decorative varieties is Utrecht Blue. It is classified as an emmer wheat, the preferred pasta wheat in Italy. It has gunmetal blue heads and black beards that bend over when mature. He has been growing it for more than 30 years. He received the first grains while visiting the Netherlands, where his wife was born.

"I spent a day in Utrecht with a large private seed collector looking at seed. He gave me some samples," recalls Ternier. "I planted them, and they grew well. I put them in the catalog, and they sold well. I don't think they were available in North America before then."

"I use a push seeder to place seeds every couple inches," says Ternier. "I snip the heads by hand as they ripen and place them in paper bags. When dry enough, I thresh with my hands or feet and then winnow and screen by hand."

Ternier grows out around 20 varieties of grain each year, including poppy, amaranth, teff, quinoa and others. He also grows out about a quarter of his other seed offerings each year. Every 3 to 4 years the entire collection is renewed. It's a job that doesn't get any easier. Last year, heavy fall rains resulted in sprouting of about 50 percent of the wheat while in the field. Other plots never germinated due to a dry spring. New additions add to the workload.

"I have more than 15 new samples from Australia and France this year," says Ternier,



Scarlet Horn carrots from the 1600's (left) and Mescher butterhead lettuce from the 1700's.



Utrecht Blue black-bearded wheat; push seeder from the 1930's places seed every couple of inches.

who also serves on the board of Seeds of Diversity Canada, a national seed saving organization. "It is already almost more work than I can handle with what I already have."

Luckily for Ternier, his customers, and his seed collection, his daughter Rachelle has joined the business. She and his sister Judy live on the family farm. Between them and

Jim, they raise about 95 percent of all the seeds offered in the catalog.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jim Ternier and Rachelle Ternier, Box 2758, Humboldt, Sask. Canada S0K 2A0 (ph 306 682-1475; info@prairiegardenseeds.ca; www.prairiegardenseeds.ca).

Where To Buy Heirloom Seeds

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

When Jeff McCormack and Patty Wallens launched a mail order heritage seed business with their products stored in baby food jars in a hall closet and bushel baskets of potato onions lining their living room, they had no inkling the idea would gain amazing traction and continue uninterrupted for nearly 40 years. "We just jumped into a business we were passionate about and figured out how to grow and manage things as we went along," says McCormack.

Today Southern Exposure Seed Exchange is one of the largest suppliers of heritage home-gardening seeds in the country. They offer about 800 different varieties of vegetable, flower, herb, grain and cover crop seeds. Their emphasis is on products for the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast; however, SESE varieties are sold in retail stores in more than half the country.

As of 2017, about 60 percent of their varieties were certified organic and none of them are chemically treated. Some of their more unusual Southern heirloom products include peanuts, peas, naturally colored cotton, collards, okra, roselle, turnip greens, corn for roasting and meal along with butterbeans. About 60 different growers in Virginia and throughout the United States produce the seeds marketed by SESE.

McCormack and Wallens sold the business to Acorn Community Farm and soon started Garden Medicinals and Culinaries, which they also sold to Acorn Community Farm. A third venture, McCormack's Botanicals, is also a thriving business.

"I've learned through these ventures that whatever one person does or accomplishes is really the result of a community of people.

Our success isn't something that Patty and I did alone. It involved a whole community of growers and people who really believed in what we were doing," McCormack says.

In addition to sales, the company does workshops and presentations on seed saving, heirloom gardening, and seed growing as a farm enterprise. Events include seed swaps, variety tastings and seed saving resource materials. Store listings and events are on the company website.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, P.O. Box 460, Mineral, Virginia 23117 (ph 540 894-9480; gardens@southernexposure.com; www.southernexposure.com).



Southern Exposure Seed Exchange offers about 800 different varieties of vegetable, flower, herb, grain and cover crop heirloom seeds.

**How To
Subscribe
To
FARM SHOW
(New & Renewal)**



Take out a new subscription (or renew your existing subscription) and get a FREE copy of our new 128-page "Rare & Exotic Breeds" book.

Yes! I want to be first to learn about latest new products. Please sign me up for FARM SHOW and send me a FREE copy of your just-published new 128-page book "Rare & Exotic Breeds".

Check here to renew.

United States

- \$23.95 for 1 yr.
- \$44.95 for 2 yrs.
- \$65.95 for 3 yrs.

Canada

- \$29.95 (Can.) for 1 yr.
- \$56.95 (Can.) for 2 yrs.
- \$82.95 (Can.) for 3 yrs.

My check (\$ _____) is enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State /Prov. _____ Zip _____

Make check payable to FARM SHOW.
Clip and mail this coupon to:
FARM SHOW, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044
Phone toll-free 800 834-9665 or go to www.farmshow.com
VISA, Mastercard, Discover, Amex, Paypal & Amazon accepted.