

New Markets Sought For Cereal Rye

Gary Zimmer wants to create demand for cereal rye. The Wisconsin soil health advocate expects to produce about 30,000 bushels of rye this year and he's building markets for it.

"We need more cash crops, and what else can you plant as late as rye in our northern states?" asks Zimmer. "You can drill it in after corn harvest as late as December and combine it by mid or late June."

An increasing number of farmers plant rye as a cover crop in the fall, only to terminate it in the spring, either before or after planting corn or soybeans in the field. Zimmer suggests a different approach, letting it mature and selling the grain as a cash crop.

The fly in the ointment at this point is the limited demand for rye grain, other than for sale as a cover crop. Zimmer hopes to change that. The co-owner of Otter Creek Organic Farm, Zimmer is also the vice president of Rye Revival, a non-profit dedicated to promoting rye.

"We are promoting it as a food crop for bakers, brewers and distillers and as animal feed for poultry and livestock producers," says Zimmer.

He points to Denmark, where antibiotics are not allowed in hog rations. Instead, they use rye for 80 percent of the hog ration.

"Their need for antibiotics seems to have gone away," says Zimmer. "We're also looking at it to replace 10 to 15 percent of the feed ration for chickens."

Distillers are the largest market for rye at this point, but most rye has been imported from Russia and Ukraine.

Zimmer isn't waiting around for buyers of his rye to appear. He is building a small-scale processing plant in a former cheese factory at the edge of his farm. It will include cleaning, separation for quality, and milling. His goal is to be able to



Clover coming through after rye harvest.

process the rye, mill it and sell it by the tote.

"We hope to have it ready to go for our new crop," says Zimmer. "We planted about 600 acres of rye this past fall at about 70 lbs. per acre."

Most commercial-minded rye producers would plant at a 90-lb. rate. However, Zimmer has a dual purpose in mind. The first week of March, he frost-seeded a four-way clover mix at about 15 lbs. per acre. His lighter rye seeding rate reduces the likelihood that the rye will lodge or shade out the clover.

When he harvests in late June, he will flail-mow the straw and the knee-high clover. Later in the summer, he will spread manure and compost on the clover, flail mowing it again in late fall. Spring of 2023, he will plow the clover and straw residue under and plant organic corn.

Long term, Zimmer's goal is to show other farmers how they can integrate a rye cash crop into their operations. "We don't want to build a huge manufacturing plant," says Zimmer. "We want to distribute the information so farmers can build their own."

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Whole Grain Pasta Made From North Dakota Wheat

The whole grain pasta developed by a North Dakota farm couple is different than commercial pastas on the market. It's truly whole grain, grinding all the wheat's parts - the bran, germ and endosperm - at the same time. By grinding the wheat with a stone mill and then running the pasta dough through a brass die, the result is a nutritious, tasty artisan pasta.

"We don't sift out any of the nutrition," says DeAnna Lozensky, who started Guardian Grains with her husband, Kelly, in 2021. She adds that the good nutrition starts with the good soil they have been building with regenerative practices on their Max, N.D., farm.

"We've been working with a science lab to create a nutritional label that is specific to our pasta," she notes. Compared to other quality pastas on the market, Guardian Grains pasta has higher protein, magnesium, zinc and manganese. It's also lower in calories and carbs, according to the lab.

The Lozenskys started their business selling wheat to consumers, bakeries and businesses that grind their own flour. To add more common pantry products (flour and pasta), they worked on a pilot project with Northern Crops Institute in Fargo to create pasta. Because the bran is used, it was challenging to get the process just right. Extruding the dough through a brass die leaves rougher edges, making it an artisan pasta that sauce sticks to especially well.

"When cooked, it's a light color with flecks of bran, and it's delicious," Lozensky says.

The flour is ground, and the pasta is made at Tuttle Rural Innovation Center in Tuttle, N.D. where the Lozenskys rent space and hire a couple of people to create their products. The Lozenskys provide the cleaned wheat from



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their 2,600-acre crop farm that includes hard red spring wheat, heritage grains such as Einkorn and a French wheat variety, as well as milling oats, peas, flax, mustard and barley.

They sell stone-milled flour for \$2/lb. and heritage grain flour for \$3 to \$4/lb. Pasta (macaroni, rotini and radiatore) sells for \$13/lb. (or buy 3 lbs. and get one free).

"We're just trying to offer better ingredients and better food for people with our natural approach to farming," Lozensky says.

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Leatherwork Durable Enough For Cowboys

"I take pride in making leather items that will last for working cowboys," says Aubrey Ottley about her High Mountain Leather creations.

She sews, tools and stamps leather in her spare time between caring for her two children, working part-time as a nurse, and helping her husband on their cow/calf ranch in Idaho.

She started by making practical items for use on their ranch including chaps, headstalls for their horses, hobbles, and doctoring bags that fit behind a saddle and hold vials and syringes and other equipment. When the Ottleys attended ranch rodeos or gathered cows with neighbors, people noticed her leatherwork, and Ottley started making things to sell in 2018.

Beyond practical working gear, she makes purses and wallets, phone pouches, leather patches for caps, earrings, journal covers and a variety of other items.

"I make sure the leather is good quality," Ottley says, noting she purchases most of it from the best U.S. leather sources - Hermann Oak and Wickett & Craig. Purses are made from the more supple chap and oil tan leathers.

"I make my own patterns and draw my own designs for tooling," she says.

Her website includes items for under \$30. Chaps start at around \$450, depending



High Mountain Leather specializes in heavy-duty items for the farm, ranch and rodeo.

on the price of leather. "I do a lot of custom work," Ottley says.

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Vermont Maple Syrup Farmers Sell Collectively

With 10,000+ taps typical for many Vermont maple syrup producers, it's become difficult for small producers with 1,000 taps or less to compete or to even find a buyer for their syrup. That's where the Maple Farmers collective comes in. It markets the syrup made by six families as a sideline business.

Cory Krieg, an electrical engineer who taps about 300 trees, manages the website and shipping and says demand is strong for the small producers' syrup.

All of them cook the sap down traditionally with wood fires and the syrup is bottled in glass bottles. Large, commercial operations use a reverse osmosis process to speed up the cooking process.

"I set it up so small maple syrup producers can get double the price of selling it in bulk," Krieg says.

Krieg provides the glass bottles and labels for each farm, so customers know exactly where the syrup comes from.

After starting the business in 2021, Krieg made some changes for 2022, including \$10 flat rate shipping (\$5 shipping for orders of two quarts). He also added half-pint bottles.

"We introduced half-pints before Christmas for gifts," he says, including collections of three and four half-pints of golden to very dark syrups.

"Everyone sold as much as they wanted in 2021," Krieg says, and customers throughout the country have shown interest in buying syrup from small family operations, paying



Cory Krieg started selling maple syrup direct with several other farmers as a collective.

\$10.95/half-pint and \$25.95/quart. Everything is U.S.-made including the glass bottles and metal lids and labels that Krieg purchased.

Krieg welcomes other small maple syrup producers in Vermont to contact him about joining Maple Farmers.

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