

## Local Food Connection: 2011 Conference

### WORKSHOP: Sourcing Local Beans, Grains, and Flours

**Description:** *Gain an understanding of the opportunities for growing beans and grains for Willamette Valley markets. Hear directly from local growers, millers, distributors and retail stores on their experiences, challenges and successes.*

**Speakers:** Harry MacCormack, Owner, Sunbow Farms; Mary Ann Jasper, Sales and Distribution, Stalford Seed Farms; Julie Tilt, Owner, Hummingbird Wholesale; George Brown, Assistant Bulk Buyer, First Alternative Natural Food Co-op; Dan Armstrong, Media, Mud City Press.

**Moderator:** Lynne Fessenden, Executive Director, Willamette Farm and Food Coalition

#### Workshop Notes:

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*Introduction by Lynne Fessenden, moderator:*

- Since last year things have taken off for the project. There are wheat, oats, flaxseed, etc. now locally available.
- Harry MacCormack has helped kick off the bean and grain project.
- Mary Ann Jasper is very active in voicing importance of organics. She works in sales for Stalford Seed Farms.
- Julie will share her experience getting flax and pumpkin seeds for Hummingbird Wholesales.
- Dan is on the Lane County Food Council.
- George is active in the movement and is the assistant bulk buyer for First Alternative Natural Food Co-op.
- James Henderson works for Hummingbird Wholesale and is active in supporting farmers through education and information.

*Comments by Harry MacCormack, Sunbow Farms:*

- Third year of this workshop. With all of the work being done on the local food front, still only 5% of the market is local food.
- Motivation for Harry is the kids (his grandson is on the cover of his book)
- 80% of food in the Willamette Valley is made of bean/grains.
- The fuel that has fueled the cheapness of the food system is not going to last.
- Beans are a difficult crop to grow in the Willamette Valley because it is a dry crop.
- Compost tea can help a lot with the transition of crops.
- We are moving back into maritime climate (short summer/long spring).
- We need to look for varieties and techniques that work well in this climate.
- We also need more research about how to properly harvest crops.

*Comments by Mary Ann Jasper, Stalford Seed Farms:*

- Green Willow Grains is processed product name (from Stalford Farm grains).
- Stalford still grows grass seed.
- Stalford has 150 acres that are organic, another 150 acres coming on next year and a goal of transitioning 150 acres every year to organic.
- All products are farm identified.

- Stalford has formed an alliance with Sunbow and A2R to process products – each product is still identified by what farm it comes from.
- Biggest barriers currently:
  - o Issue of price – there are fair-trade issues with farming. Stalford has joined the Domestic Fair Trade Association.
  - o Issues of people’s perception of whole wheat – People are so accustomed to white, all-purpose flour. We don’t make that because it takes a lot of equipment to process. Only huge mills can do that. If people want local flour they need to buy whole wheat. USDA guidelines in 2013 for schools will require 50% whole grain.

*Comments by George Brown, Assistant Bulk Buyer at First Alternative Co-op:*

- Has worked at the Co-op for the last 5 years.
- There is a growing awareness of where food is coming from. The Co-op started labeling country of origin on products.
- The Co-op wants more local products. There is a want for local but also certain price range.
- The Co-op came up with the “Local 6” label for Linn and the counties that border it.
- There is a clear demand for both local and/or organic
- The Co-op has a labeling process that recognizes different levels of organic transition.
- Sourcing from farms directly or through distributors both have pros and cons. Distributors are very consistent and there is also the need for fast turnaround and pricing. Distributors simplify things too because you can order more than on product. The farms that contact you directly are great – you don’t have to worry about tracking them because they remind you. Going directly through the farm cuts the number of miles the food has to travel.
- It is hard to justify the high price of local beans if they are not organic.

*Comments by Julie Tilt, Owner of Hummingbird Wholesale:*

- For Hummingbird, relationship to growers and customers is most important. Loyalty is really appreciated.
- We do a lot of education about products that we sale.
- James Henderson’s focus is on the bean/grain project.
- It is best if farmers can sell direct, but Hummingbird is very willing to help see the products and at almost any amount.
- We consider ourselves DSA “Distributor Supported Agriculture” because we are in a position to help with upfront costs.

*Comments by James, staff at Hummingbird Wholesale*

- Helps research and educate farmers
- It is hard to sell products for the justified price.
- Mark Beauchamp from Café Yumm! is a great example of a success story – has switched to buying local beans.

*Comments by Dan Armstrong, MudCity Press:*

- Worked with South Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project.
- Lynne is a very large piece of this project.
- Everything starts where you live – over the last 30 years grass seed became the popular crop. All of the canneries have disappeared from the area that represents the bean/grain past.

- More recently worry about food security and demand for local products has promoted rebuilding of the food system, leading to the bean and grain project.
- There is a need of dry storage capacity – piece of infrastructure that is missing.
- Homestead farms are another piece of the puzzle – these farms need beans and grains to be self-sufficient.
- The Bean and Grain project has begun the process of involving farmers but we really need to inspire consumers about buying and cooking beans/grains.
- Hummingbird Wholesale is going to be holding a “fill your pantry” event shortly.

Julie:

We need to make this a community movement. Farmers can't be expected to shoulder all of the risk of climate change.

Harry:

We work together to figure out the problems and troubleshoot – farmer owned, wholesale style.

The moderator had all of the buyers and growers in the room stand up and introduces themselves.

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#### Q&A Discussion

**Q:** What about the Portland area and the rest of Oregon?

**A:**

- Nana Cardoon is a non-profit in the Portland area.
- Different farms in Oregon (specifically Eastern Oregon) have cheaper land and more climate friendly for growing beans/grains. It is important for us to support the local farmer that is going under.
- This project is focused on converting farms back to food crops.

**Q:** Is there a local mill that would let them use a specific machine that they needed for processing their product.

**A:** Another person in the room said, “yes” and they could work it out.

#### *Additional Comments...*

- Future of big farms – they will be broken into smaller plots. \
- Community needs to want to learn how to use what we can easily grow here.
- A representative for Local Foods for Schools said: We need long storage because the fruit of the harvest takes place when schools are out of session.
  - We need to build up the infrastructure for farmers and buyers.
  - There is a huge discrepancy for what schools are willing to pay for beans and what they actually cost. The 4J school district is not a self operated food system – there might be more potential if it was. The USDA sets school district food sourcing guidelines for pricing and it is way too low.