## Field Day Focuses on Managing Organic Grains for Markets

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New York Correspondent

PENNSYLVANIA FURNACE, Pa. — The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, or PASA, held a field day June 25th on managing organic wheat, spelt, emmer and einkorn for local markets. The event was held at the Penn State research farm in Pennsylvania Furnace and was co-sponsored by the Organic Growers Research and Information Sharing Network, or OGRIN, and Penn State Extension.

About 40 people came to the field day. The event drew curious novices and experts from as far away as Virginia and Canada.

Elizabeth Dyck from OGRIN and Greg Roth, professor of agronomy at Penn State, introduced the day.

"This project has two years to go," said Dyck, of the USDA's OREI Value-added Grains for Local and Regional Food Systems. "Those of you who want to grow grains, this is for you. We really want to reintegrate some of these wonderful crops back into the northeast farming system.'

Dyck encouraged people to take advantage of the resources available and ask questions of the organizations involved in the grant (OGRIN, Cornell, Greenmarket, PASA, Penn State, North Dakota State, NOFA-NY, and the Northern Plains Agriculture Society).

"Let us help if we can," she said, encouraging people to join the seedbuying club since getting seed for these specialty crops is not simple, and is best achieved through group

Dyck said farmers that are willing to do seed trials are needed to get the seed out on the farm and see how it does.

Roth gave an overview of organic measures for small grains. Winter grains, in general, are favored because they have better weed control and fewer diseases. They also tend to yield more than spring grains, which can yield up to 40 percent less. However, spring grains tend to have higher protein, which makes them desirable for bread.

One practice he recommended was growing a sod crop, like clover, to help build the soil prior to fall planting, as well as adding nitrogen in the spring. Frost seeding of clover is also advised, though farmer Joel Steigman said that timing on this can be tricky. Putting the clover in too early can allow the plant to get too big and can cause trouble when combining the crop.

Dyck and Roth led discussions at the field trials. Fullcaster, Red fife and Gold coin are some of the heritage wheats promising good performance. Dyck warned that the age of a variety doesn't necessarily make it better. Frederick, she said, is a good modern type, developed in Guelph in 1971. This good tasting wheat has excellent baking qualities and does well under organic management.

The trials are looking at seeding rates and applications of nitrogen, which vary in timing and amount. Anecdotal information has revealed heritage wheats need less nitrogen, but these trials should show some

Different spelt and emmer variet-

ies are also in the trials. When wheat fails, the historical record shows that emmer will come through, said Dyck. Emmer may have a longer planting window in the spring.

This tough crop works well as a flatbread and for pasta, but not for leavened bread. Einkorn makes great bread and is valued because of its high lutein content, which is shown to reduce risks in diseases of

Charlie White of Penn State Extension showed how he used a tool called a Greenseeker to monitor chlorophyll rates in a crop, an indicator of fertility.

Conversation in the field also included plant diseases and markets. Habits like taking straw off a field are valuable financially, but growers should be aware that this removes a potassium source that will have to be added as an input.

Lunch was prefaced by sampling emmer, einkorn and spelt. Blind tasting of emmer and standard pasta salad was also on the menu. The emmer was provided by Small Valley Milling, and people did enjoy this darker, whole grain pasta, though its taste was masked by the other vegetables in the salad.

After lunch, White and Dyck showed some equipment used in processing small grains. Several tabletop mills were on display, as well as a thresher from Maine which works well for plot work. A small air-screen seed cleaner was used to demonstrate how to remove field debris and weeds.

This, like much of the rest of the day, was open for discussion. One person said he's going to get his wheat threshed by someone who manufactures small scale threshers; this part of his harvest will be handled at demonstrations. The manufacturer gets to show off his equipment, while the farmer gets grain that's one step closer to sale

Old seed cleaners and combines are readily available for sale, though the cost of maintenance and parts are a consideration. Purchasing screens for a seed cleaner, for example, can easily cost more than the cleaner itself.

Dyck said people have to have the entire harvest and handling process thought through and planned before putting seed in the ground.

Dehulling capacity is under development. One farmer described using horse mats on an old burr mill to create a dehuller for his spelt. Julie Dawson, a researcher from Cornell, talked about a dehuller that mechanical engineering students were creating.

The day closed with two speakers who have experience in the value-added market. Nigel Tudor of Weatherbury Farm in Avella, Pa., described his experiences growing grain. In small plots, he's grown heritage seeds he's found for sale in European food markets and elsewhere, along with bulking out seed to have enough for growing a good amount of grain.

One of the emmers he's grown is now in trials at Penn State, where his name stood on a placard at one end of a plot.

Tudor has been building a farm scale dehuller with the help of a Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education farmer grant; the machine is about ready to use.

Joel Steigman from Small Valley Milling in Halifax, Pa., described his family's grain farming, which began in 1975 but switched to organic in the late 1990s.

"We went organic when we decided to do value-added," he said. "And it's the only way to go."

The process of building up the equipment to clean, dehull and mill grains has been a long one, drawing his son, Eric, back to the family farm about five years ago. The first flour made right at the mill - another mill has been processing their spelt for some time - was on a table at the event, and he offered bags to people. Elaine Steigman requested feedback from bakers who took some to try.

"Everybody's got to find your own market," Joel Steigman said, suggesting that there is room for lots of farms to figure out how to earn money with adding value to grains. Comparing Small Valley Milling to another Pennsylvania operation, Joel Steigman said, "We're out in the bush. The Kellys sell at farmers markets, and we sell by the

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