

VERMONT FOOD SYSTEM PLAN PRODUCT BRIEF



PRODUCT:

Bread

What's At Stake?

Vermont is well-known for its bakeries, from artisanal bakeries to nationally distributed brands. Finding locally grown grains that are suitable for making good bread has been a long-term challenge for Vermont's bakers.

Current Conditions

Vermont's small bread bakers sell products through food co-ops, independent retailers, and farmers markets, and to cafés and restaurants. Larger bread companies' primary markets are regional major metropolitan areas. Consolidation in the distribution and grocery sectors has made it difficult to operate successfully as a mid-sized bakery, as access to national grocery chains necessitates a certain scale, leading Vermont's bakers to either scale up to national sales or remain at a smaller scale and mostly distribute in-state.

While Vermont bakers wish to purchase local ingredients, local wheat faces barriers to bakery sales. It can be difficult for small-scale farmers to get access to the same resources that are available to large grain producers (see [Food-Grade Grains brief](#)). These challenges extend from the field right through to storage, cleaning, and milling, as well as competing against commodity prices. Bakers are thus more likely to purchase honey, maple syrup, barley malt, or non-

wheat grains from local producers.

While Vermont's bakers purchase far more wheat than any other grain, many small bakers are interested in purchasing local, non-wheat grains, are willing to pay a premium for them, and would need relatively small amounts, ranging from one to eight tons annually. Bakers are also interested in processed products such as malted barley.

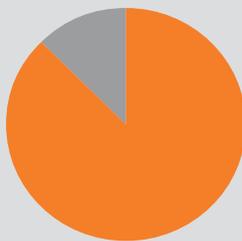
With specialty grains that are added in small quantities primarily for flavor purposes, the farmer is not subjected to the challenges and costly testing involved in growing a quality wheat crop.

By growing specialty grain crops, or selling non-grain inputs to bakeries, our local farmers can focus on what makes other local foods superior: flavor. They also enter a market that demands neither large quantities nor globally competitive prices.

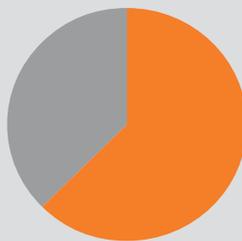
In a survey of eight Vermont bread bakers...



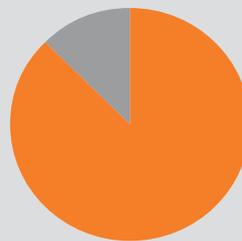
All eight indicated they would use more locally or regionally grown grain if they were able.



Seven indicated that they would pay between 20% to 40% more for local grains than for equivalent grains from a non-regional source.



Five have their own processing equipment on site.



Seven would like to find local grains other than wheat and rye, including emmer, einkorn, spelt, Kamut, corn, oats, and barley.



All eight are only interested in using organically grown grains.

Bottlenecks & Gaps

- The state's few grain farmers are focused primarily on wheat, with a few growing rye and corn, but it is not easy for a small grain grower to produce wheat of the quality and low price that bakers have come to expect from the commodity market.
- Non-wheat grains of interest to bakers are only sparsely available from Vermont sources, if they are available at all.
- Lack of grain aggregation, processing, and quality-testing infrastructure limits growers' access to bread makers, and creates inefficiencies and uncertainty for bread makers interested in purchasing local grain products.
- The quality of each crop of wheat can vary widely depending on the variety grown, annual weather patterns, and soil conditions. These quality differences are not apparent without sending the wheat off to be tested. What may appear to be a good crop of wheat could in fact be of limited or no use to commercial bakers.

Opportunities

- Vermont's bread bakers and farmers are innovative, unafraid to take risks and experiment.
- The potential market that non-wheat grains represent for the state's farmers is small, but the prices that most small bakers would be able to pay for non-wheat grains is significantly higher than they would pay for wheat.
- Value-added products such as malted barley would be attractive to bakers and provide a higher price point to growers.
- Processing does not need to be a prerequisite for selling grain to small bakers, as many of them have small grain mills.
- Demand for small quantities of specialty grains in the state and potential growth in demand for these grains in the future, whether wheat or otherwise, gives Vermont farmers new market opportunities and can create more diverse crop rotations beneficial to soil and water quality.

Recommendations

- Increase funding for research to identify marketable grains that grow well in Vermont, such as barley, spelt, and heirloom wheat varieties. With climate change and ever more unpredictable weather and seasonal patterns, creating new varieties and production strategies that can be resilient in Vermont will become of even greater importance than it is now. Cost: \$75,000 per year.
- Develop regional market connections and a marketing mechanism for Vermont grain products, particularly specialty grains. Provide funding for the Northern Grain Growers Association to develop a marketing program for Vermont grain farmers which highlights product quality. Convene interested stakeholders (UVM Extension, nonprofits, government agencies, producer groups, buyers) to facilitate purchasing relationships between producers and bakeries. Cost: \$25,000 per year.
- Create a Vermont grains processing center, which could control the quality of grain through consistent cleaning, drying, milling, processing, and storing. This center would encourage more working lands to transition to grains and have a multitude of benefits, including job creation, market security, and opportunities for value-added processing. It would also increase the reliability of grain quality for buyers, mitigating the risk to bakers of quality inconsistencies, and boosting the potential monetary value for farmers. (See [Food-Grade Grains brief](#))
- Increase funding for technical assistance. Farmers and grain-related businesses have technical assistance requirements that are not always readily available in Vermont. Building connections through UVM Extension and the Northern Grain Growers Association to increase technical assistance availability would improve grain quantity and quality. Cost: 1 FTE at UVM Extension, \$100,000 per year.
- Explore and develop organic transition programs, modeled after similar programs developed by La Milanaise and Kashi, in collaboration with larger commercial processors selling baking flour, such as King Arthur Flour, Champlain Valley Milling, and Maine Grains.

Farm to Plate is Vermont's food system plan being implemented statewide to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sector and improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) facilitates, supports, and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers, and the environment.

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