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The Whole Grain Connection Newsletter #44 September 2026

Organic wheat farmer - topics after harvest

The most inspiring time to be thinking about farming the next crops is right after harvest! Hence these notes from someone who would really love to see more California grown organic wheat in the hands of bakers with mills, who want to provide 100% whole wheat bread for their customers. Times have changed from farmers growing small crops of organic heritage wheat for bakers just to try. The now large number of whole grain mills and miller-bakers means that the demand is for heritage wheat by the ton-pallet every week or so, from 50-acre fields and larger. In this way, the whole wheat baker can properly make 100% whole wheat bread for their customers consistently. Increasingly therefore we also have a need for localized groups of organic farmers to cooperate and form grain hubs for greater efficiency of production.

After all, the farmer must find a customer miller or miller-baker before growing these larger amounts of heritage wheat. So first, how can farmers find the miller-bakers who would buy their crop all nicely cleaned, lab tested for high quality, and bagged ready to pour into their mills? By now the [New American Stone Mills](#) lists an astonishing number of miller-baker customers. [Ostroler, Meadows](#) and [Jansen](#) grist mills have a longer history and online searching for owners of these mills leads to even more miller-bakers. Yet more whole grain miller-bakers can be found who are using air-swept impact mills and air classifying mills, such as the [Unifine](#), [Hosokawa](#) and [Reynolds](#). (No need to sift flours from these air classifying mills because they grind the bran as fine as you want to disappear into the flour.) There are bakers without their own mills also making 100% whole wheat breads who would like to find organic heritage whole wheat flour. These bakers could possibly be found with a focused search on-line. The closer to the farm the better so that a rapport can be easily established between farmer and miller-baker. Even so, bakers demand a price to pay for their wheat that is often far below the farmer costs to

grow high-quality organic heritage wheat for 100% whole grain foods. Everyone needs to be properly compensated for their work and in the end the baker's customers know this. However, heritage wheat as a rotation in an organic three-year cycle with legumes and brassicas, can also be regarded as a soil improver. The deep roots of tall heritage varieties generously sequester carbon. Thus, an organic wheat farmer partially offsets the low price that bakers pay by having the wheat increase the agricultural value of the soil for other crops in rotation.

How can the farmer please these miller-bakers? Bakers produce a myriad of breads, pastries, cakes, cookies and more. The farmer having perfected a wheat crop can sell it by knowing which baked goods the crop is best for and finding the baker who would therefore appreciate it. The most important initial step is for the farmer to be growing a wheat crop that is highly appropriate for their local climate and soil, as well as being suited to a wanted end use. Only then can it be top quality for the end user.

In California the most appropriate heritage wheat is the short season spring type, best planted into a warming season after the New Year. The generally dry summers give us the advantage to grow white bran wheat varieties. If instead these are grown in a rainy summer, or on the coast, there is a great risk of sprout damage in the field. Red bran wheat is much less susceptible to sprout damage. However, California breeders have produced modern varieties that can be grown in a longer season to take advantage of all the rain available in the late fall and winter, especially in drought years. Hence the generalization among commodity growers that wheat in California is to be planted in the late fall.

From the [heritage wheat seed catalog](#) of the *Whole Grain Connection*, for bread I would choose *India-Jammu* since it is known to have favorable bread-making genes and produces a bread with light colored crumb and mild wheat flavor. To provide expected protein nutrition from bread and for optimal bread-making the protein should be 12% and preferably as high as 15%. Indeed, there is some expectation that bread provides at least this much protein, even though it is not yet officially defined. Heritage wheat without breadmaking genes can also be used to make breads of various types successfully, especially if the protein is close to 14% or more. In an organic system, farmers are achieving the desired protein level by growing the wheat after alfalfa or other nitrogen fixing legume, and possibly with a brassica in a third year of rotation. Thus, wheat or any other grain is grown in a given field, only every three years. This rotation is also beneficial for weed control and prevention of fungal disease in the wheat.

For tortillas, cookies, cakes and short pastry, I would choose *Sonora* and equally *Wit Wolkoring* (*Wit Wolkoren*). These two varieties were likely once grown together as a landrace originally in Mediterranean countries, and only later in the American South-West by European explorers. *Wit Wolkoring*, with a straw-colored (white) head, was sourced from South Africa and likely was taken there together with *Rooi Wolkoren* (bronze-red head, *Sonora* look alike) at the time of European exploration of the African continent at an earlier date than exploration of the American continent. *Chiddam Blanc de Mars* originally collected in France has also found favor among bakers.

Durum-Iraq has been selected for its pleasing flavor in whole wheat pasta. *Bluebeard durum* seems perfectly aligned with the climate in southern California and Arizona. Both heritage and modern durum wheat are without doubt, best planted to grow in

a short season. Thus, in the Imperial Valley of California, durum wheat can be planted in the late fall due to the early onset of summer drought and heat. Further north, durum is best planted well into the New Year, so that the growing season can be short and end in dry heat.

Spelt is a wanted wheat type by bakers, but it is rarely grown in California. The coastal California climate with cool and foggy summers is not ideal for growing wheat, although there are farmers who grow successful crops. They juggle the planting time so that harvest can be in sunny September, and grow *India-Jammu* and *Sonora*. One hobby small-scale farmer has been growing Spanish spelt successfully on the California coast for many years and makes bread with it for family and friends. The origin of this Spanish spelt is in Northern Spain on the Bay of Biscay where it is mountainous, foggy, rainy and likened to the climates of Ireland or Switzerland; there is an ancient bread culture in the region based on this spring type spelt wheat. Northern Spain is the origin of the *Asturien* variety as well as the *La Pola*, *Silanes* and *Oviedo* spring spelt varieties. All likely make good bread of the style typical of Asturias. The *Asturien* variety is perhaps the most representative and has been added to the *Slow Food Ark of Taste*. We have propagated this spring spelt seed on the California coast and see that it performs well.

Ideally spelt is harvested with some residual moisture in the heads (spikes), so that the grain is not accidentally threshed out of the spikelets containing the grain during combine harvesting. This fits well with the near constant humidity near the coast or in mountain areas. However, after harvest the spikelets need to be dried down to less than 10% moisture ideally, before being dehulled with specialized dehulling equipment. Before spelt can be grown more widely on the coast we need to equip grain handling facilities with both grain dryers and dehullers..... Small scale rice de-huskers work well and are available from a [distributor in California](#). Grain drying methods are evolving away from the gas-powered dryers, towards solar and the use of dehydrating pellets that can be dried out economically and re-used multiple times.

The forecast is increasingly towards a wet winter in 2026/2027. Under these circumstances heritage wheat can best be planted well into the New Year after the ground has drained somewhat, to make planting workable. In practice if heritage wheat is planted in November /December in a very wet season, it will grow excessively tall and likely will lodge. If the season is exceedingly wet and spring is cold the early planted crop may be flooded and risks fungal infection. Thus, planting heritage seed in November-December in much of California is not recommended especially if an El Niño wet winter is likely.

Keep up the good work of growing organic wheat for whole grain products! The need is enormous!

California Malt Sourdough (& Bulgur Wheat) ***The 100% Whole Wheat Square Slice Sandwich Loaf***

The hearth baked artisan sourdough loaf has been crowned King in the surge towards 100% whole grain loaves. The aroma, crust and natural shapes are entrancing everyone.

Underneath however, there are those who would really love to have 100% whole wheat sourdough in nicely pre-sliced squares with a softer crust that they can pull from the freezer and drop in the toaster for breakfast, or for a hearty sandwich for lunch. No slippery cutting-board or dangerous saw-knife needed. Pardon me for the revelation. There are also many folks with teeth problems from toddlers cutting new teeth, 8-year-old children losing teeth and gaining new ones, and the elderly with far fewer teeth than are needed to properly do justice to the crust on a high temperature baked hearth loaf. That's a lot of us wanting comfortable soft crusted square pre-sliced bread!

It's been more than three years since I began using an all-malt flour sourdough starter and a portion of pre-cooked grain in the form of bulgur or grain flakes for my bread. More recently I've included a small amount of salt in the all-malt sourdough starter. Finally, I've increased my understanding of how this system can produce such a soft crumb – softer even than when a porridge is used as the precooked grain ingredient. The extras provided by bulgur are some resistant starch and B-vitamins especially folate – but there's no doubt more to the story.

Hence a description of this system with [California malt sourdough](#) and a formulation and method for [100% Whole Wheat Square Slice Sandwich Bread](#), now posted at www.barmbaker.org on the RECIPES page.

As an aside, www.barmbaker.org is an overflow website for www.wholegrainconnection.org that was produced with an editing wizard that is now out of date and no longer functioning.

Your comments and questions are welcome via e-mail to Monica Spiller:
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