

Missoula-based Kamut International named Exporter of the Year by state

[By JENNA CEDERBERG of the Missoulian](#) missoulian.com | Posted: Monday, March 14, 2011 9:30 pm |

If you've been to Italy lately, you've probably heard of Kamut.

The sweet, nutty, organic khorasan wheat's popularity has exploded in Italy, where it's used in pastas, breads and almost any other kind of snack you can imagine.

Kamut isn't as widely known in the U.S., but it's grown on thousands of acres in Montana, and the headquarters of the company that manages its brand are in Missoula.

In fact, the owners of Kamut International were recently honored with the Montana Department of Commerce's 2010 Exporter of the Year award in Helena.

Kamut CEO Trevor Blyth said the family-owned business is expanding rapidly as the demand for the wheat continues to grow abroad. It's exported heavily around the world, especially to Europe. Almost half of the Kamut produced each year is sold in Italy.

Blyth's complicated job involves coordinating growers and contracting agents to make sure demand around the world can be met. He works with his wife, Tara, out of Missoula.

Although popularity in the U.S. hasn't yet matched that of Europe, Kamut has capitalized on the fact that Montana leads the nation in organic wheat production.

Doug Crabtree, the Montana Department of Agriculture organic certification program manager, said there are more organic farmers being certified in the state each year.

Organic certification was up 18 percent in 2010, and out of the 153 organic farmers certified through the state, most grow wheat.

"(Montana is) a good place to grow wheat, period. I think we have some advantages in organic production. Our climate is relatively less susceptible to pests and disease than other areas where they might have more rainfall," Crabtree said.

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**Blyth's family** first obtained the khorasan grain 30 years ago, when his uncle, Bob Quinn, and grandfather, Mack Quinn, began farming the wheat in Big Sandy.

Maintaining the highest quality of their product has remained a top priority. Blyth said in order to use the Kamut brand name, farmers must uphold the high standards set by the company.

"For licensed customers to use (the Kamut) trademark, they have to follow our rules," he said.

It's always organic and un-hybridized wheat. "It's never been bred to change what it is," Blyth said.

One of the many benefits in keeping the product pure is the fact that many people who have wheat sensitivities can still eat Kamut. Blyth believes that's because Kamut has never been genetically modified. Kamut "keeps wheat the way it was 1,000 years ago," Blyth said.

The company is currently funding research to determine why people with wheat sensitivities can eat Kamut.

Kamut now contracts for 42,000 acres of wheat and expects to expand that to 70,000 acres this year. In Montana, 13 Kamut growers produce the wheat on 8,000 acres, a figure Blyth would like to double this year.

The biggest growth engine for the company continue to be export to Europe and Canada.

Further expansion this year will come as Kamut is shipped for the first time to South America, and the company also hopes to expand to South Africa soon.

Blyth and his wife will travel to South Africa this spring to meet with partners there.

Although they've had the best success growing their wheat in north-central Montana, Kamut also recently started working with a growing partner in Australia.

The international nature of Kamut's work doesn't change the fact that "we're a Montana company," Blyth said.

If you're in Missoula and want to try the products that use Kamut, Blyth said the Good Food Store carries several lines that use the wheat.

The Good Food Store deli also makes a Kamut Mediterranean salad, which is a mix of the grain, balsamic vinegar and various vegetables.

"They've been doing it for years and I think it's still a pretty popular product," Blyth said.

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