



## Montana Flour and Grain looking to contract more Khorasan acres

Wheat ideally suited for dryland organic farmers

By Terri Adams, The Prairie Star

If you are looking to plant something that is experiencing a strong upswing in the market, despite the economic downturn, you may want to look into Kamut brand Khorasan wheat.

Kamut is the registered trade name used to market ancient, hard Khorasan wheat that is grown organically to keep it pure and protected from modern breeding programs.

Andre Giles, president of Montana Flour and Grain, said Kamut brand Khorasan grain is only grown under contract. He also said the vast majority of producers return and replant the grain the following season. Several have been planting the crop for years.

"It is ideally suited for Montana dryland organic farmers," Giles said.

There is still time to contract for the 2009 growing season.

Seeding runs from mid-April through the end of May. Interested producers can contact Giles at Montana Flour and Grains in Fort Benton, Mont., at 406-622-5436. Producers will need to agree to certified organic growing methods but their price is guaranteed.

Last year, 41,900 acres of Khorasan wheat were contracted, an 18 percent increase from 2007. This year their contracted acres have already increased and they are hoping to finish just under 50,000 acres. Currently most of the world's Kamut brand Khorasan wheat is grown in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, but Bob Quinn, president and founder of Kamut International, would like to see Montana and North Dakota move forward with their acreage.

Trevor Blyth, Kamut International's new CEO, and nephew of Bob Quinn, said, "We contracted with 15 farmers in Montana in 2008. They were located generally along the highline from Chouteau County to Daniels County by Scobey."

He said that Kamut's goal for pricing "has always been to be as fair and stable as possible and to set our prices to be generally above the noise of market fluctuations. We set these prices in the spring when we do our contracting."

Kamut brand wheat's ability to produce high quality grains without costly fertilizers and pesticides makes it an excellent dryland crop.

Like all Khorasan wheat, Kamut is a hollow-stem wheat.

"But it is heavy walled and thick so we haven't really seen (wheat stem) sawfly infestation in it," Quinn said.

That thick wall on the stem may be protecting it from the insect. It also creates a remaining straw of first-rate quality for mulch or animals, making it a double-cash crop.

One reason Kamut brand products are experiencing a strong and growing market is because they offer flavor and health rolled into one giant kernel.

Twice the size of regular wheat kernels, Kamut brand Khorasan wheat shows 20 to 40 percent more protein than other hard wheats; is higher in vitamins B1, B2, E and niacin; is significantly higher in selenium, a strong antioxidant; and offers more lipids and amino acids than other wheats.



**Trevor Blyth, Kamut International's new CEO, left, with Andre Giles, president of Montana Flour and Grain at one of the trade shows.**

Lipids and amino acids are used for energy storage, regulating our metabolism and as the building blocks of protein in our bodies, making the grain a high-energy wheat.

Only two or three servings of Kamut products a day will provide 100 percent of the body's daily requirement of selenium. All these features, added to its wonderful flavor, help keep Kamut brand product sales strong and growing even in a weakened economy.

Khorasan is an ancient relative of durum and is sometimes referred to as King Tut's Wheat, the Prophet's Wheat or Camel Tooth Wheat. The history of Kamut is as unique as the grain.

In 1949 a Montana airman, by the name of Earl Dedman was stationed in Spain after World War II. He was given 36 kernels of giant, banana-shaped wheat and was told it came from an Egyptian tomb. Dedman mailed the wheat back home to his father, a farmer in the Fort Benton area. His father planted the kernels and wheat began to sprout.

In 1963, Bob Quinn, from Big Sandy, Mont., was given a handful of the giant wheat at a county fair. He was struck by the novelty of the wheat's size.

A few years later, while attending University of California-Davis, Quinn was eating corn nuts and read that the snack was made from a giant corn. He remembered the giant wheat he'd seen and asked his father to track it down. They found some, contacted the Corn Nut company and sparked corporate interest in the oversized kernels.

However, when the company found out the Quinns were the only suppliers, they lost interest. Quinn did not.

Over the years Quinn grew, tested and marketed the wheat and slowly it caught the attention of buyers around the world.

Today Quinn's company, Kamut International, owns the Kamut brand trademark and guides grain production and trademark promotion here in the U.S. and Canada, as well as overseas. Quinn has also traveled the world testing growing sites and further establishing the rapidly growing international markets.

On his travels he's also been able to study the wheat grains found inside the Egyptian tombs - "and Khorasan isn't one of them," he admits, but it is still a pure and ancient grain. In Turkey he found small patches of the grain being grown by local farmers who claim it was with Noah on the Ark. In Turkey it is still called the Prophet's Wheat or Camel's Tooth Wheat because of its shape.

Around the world, Kamut wheat's golden-yellow grain produces a fine yellow flour which is used in everything from breads and pastas to cereal, coffee, beer and ice cream.

Pete Rysted, owner of Great Harvest Breads in Great Falls, Mont., makes and bakes Kamut bread every week.

"It's a great bread," said Rysted.

The bread boasts a nutty, buttery flavor that has a hint of natural sweetness. Customers love the smooth flavor of the bread, he said.

Rysted sells a lot of his Kamut product to people who suffer from wheat sensitivities.

"Many wheat sensitivities are to modern varieties of wheat," Rysted said. "Kamut brand Khorasan wheat is a pure variety that is thousands of years old."

It hasn't been genetically altered or engineered. Because of that a lot of wheat-sensitive people can eat Kamut bread without problems. Rysted did note that Kamut cannot help those who suffer from Celiac disease. Celiac is an auto-immune disease which affects a person's ability to process wheat gluten. Since Khorasan, like all wheat, has gluten in it, it should be avoided by those with Celiac disease.

Adverse reactions to wheat are one of the most commonly shared food allergies in the world. In the U.S. alone it is estimated that one to six percent of the population suffers from the effects of a wheat allergy or sensitivity.

During the past few years, Kamut International has funded several research projects to learn and understand the differences that allow most people with severe wheat sensitivity to eat Kamut products without any difficulty. They are beginning to have some breakthroughs and study results which will be published in the coming months.

With the increasing demand for Kamut brand products, Kamut International continues to test growing sites around the world. So far the best growing conditions are found in northeast and north central Montana, northwest North Dakota, southern Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

(Editorial note: I purchased a loaf of warm Kamut bread from Great Harvest Bakery. Later than night I served Kamut bread, along with three other breads, at a dinner party. The Kamut proved to be very popular. It is not only healthy but was actually preferred over traditional wheat bread with its smooth, enjoyable flavor, texture and color.)

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