

# REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(THE WHEAT FIELD, THE RYE FIELD, THE BARLEY FIELD, AND THE OAT FIELD)

As part of our series on preserving farms, I set out to talk to farmers and other members of the grain food chain about their recent attempts to grow grains in New York.

*By Deblucke*

Am I in the right field?

Ever since the Erie Canal, the Hudson Valley has outsourced grain production because--let's face it--the climate here is difficult and Ohio wheat is cheap. Now, thanks to the Farm Brewery Bill, the Farm Distillery Bill, and GrowNYC, suddenly everyone is hungry for local grains--brewers, distillers, bakers, dairy cows, chickens, and hogs, all locavores. Time to sow!

In England my family grew grain. People always say to me you must understand how to deal with rain. But we get twice as much rain here as in the UK.

The county of Essex, UK Annual Rainfall 24" Columbia County, NY\* Annual Rainfall 49"

You harvest the crop the day it's ready because you never know when it's going to...pour.

Stuart Farr, Biological Farmer, Hudson Valley Hops and Grains

It's alchemy, what we're doing right here. The raw grain is starch, protein, and a dormant embryo. We're waking it up by steeping it in water for 2 days. Then, we spread it on the floor so it germinates. This converts the protein to enzymes which in turn converts the starch into sugar. The plant does the work itself. Then we kiln it. This is our 800th batch.

Dennis Nesel Hudson Valley Malt

Smells good. Try a bite! The flavor is awesome.

It's all happening within a three mile radius. Ken grows it, Dennis and his wife Jeanette, malt it, Erik turns it into beer!

Erik matted barley

A wet environment can mean a great yield, but increases the risk of Fusarium, the fungus that causes the aptly named Vomitoxin.

Regulations mandate less than 1 part per million for human consumption and 5-10 ppm for livestock feed--pigs are the least partial to Vomitoxin.

Meeting these standards is hard, even harder for organic farmers who do not use fungicides.

We work on prevention: inoculating with specific bacteria and mycorrhizal fungi, fertilizing with molasses/liquid fish/kelp, analyzing plants for mineral imbalances, and using cover crops to rebuild the soil.

Stuart, again

With stone-milled flour you get the flavor of the grain. With roller-milled flour you get the carbs and protein, which have very little taste. The flavor is in the wheat germ, bran, and amino acids.

Grains taste of a place. The same seed in different ground will produce a different flavor.

We make fresh flours. Small batch. No flour is good after 3 months.

Don Lewis Farmer/Baker/Miller Wild Hive Farm Community Grain Project

Essentially, you're drinking the Hudson Valley.

Erik Bell Old Klavervack Brewery

Al started 25 years ago as an organic farmer. He was growing his own feed for his own animals. Now we just grow the feed.

Our customers are other farmers. You have to use organic feed for your chickens if you sell organic eggs.

Al is my dad.

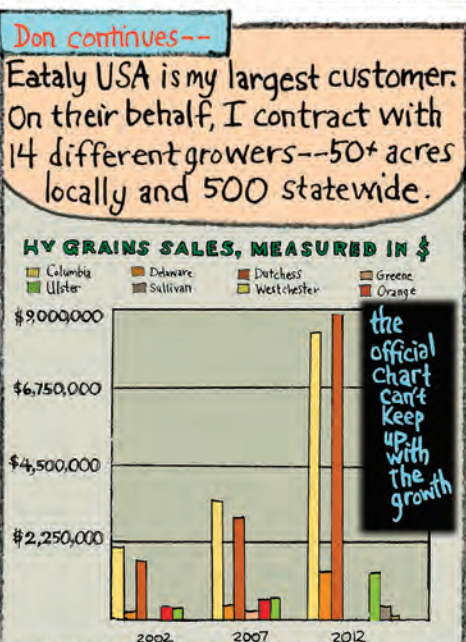
The business model for animal feed is that we make far less per acre, but we don't have to do several rounds of cleaning. It's less intensive.

Lightning Tree Farm The Earnharts and Jacqui Guest

Of course, no market is fixed.

In the last ten years, grass-fed beef has become a thing. So those cattle aren't eating any grain at all.

Jacqui Guest Manager



Originally, I was interested in grain as a cover crop. With vegetables, I rotate fields every 2-3 years. If the cover crop is plowed under I get no income.

Ken Migliorelli 3rd generation Farmer Migliorelli Farms

I started with wheat--was unsuccessful--too much Vomitoxin. I tried rye--sold that to a distillery.

I started growing barley on a patch of Hoosic gravel soil, very well-drained. This year, I got the seed into the soil 2 weeks early and was able to harvest in July. Then, it rained for weeks and other farmers lost their crops.

I modified this silo for barley so the air can circulate. It has to be stored at 11-12% moisture... too wet, it molds... too dry it doesn't stay alive.

Maybe 3-4 years out of 6, I get it right.

One year, the deer ate all the soybeans. Then...the geese ate all the winter wheat. We tried blasting sound at them. We tried dogs. They just kept coming back.

GULP, GULP

You know what else is a problem? ROCKS!

Duch! Duch! Duch!

Jeanine

The Preliminary Research Summary from the Hudson Valley Small Grain Project: "The most encouraging news... is that the Hudson Valley can produce high quality, food-grade grains." So while farmers may struggle to raise yields and hit the very high quality bar, they're doing just fine. They're expanding and the knowledge base grows every year. Good news for anyone who likes beer...or bread...or chicken...or eggs...or oatmeal...or hamburgers...or bourbon...or bacon.

Jeanine Earnhart Asst. Manager/Farmer

\* NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation predicts up to 54.5" for the 2020s

\*\* One assumes nature designed livestock to be able to digest a weed or two.