Preface: A Call to Arms

Grain has always been an important part of the human story.

Over the past 9,500 years, humankind has progressed from cultivating wild grasses with the largest seeds, to building ovens and baking bread, to inventing water mills, threshing machines, high-tech combines and other specialized equipment. As baker Jonathan Stevens of Hungry Ghost Bread notes, "That whole process — and all the people it takes to cooperate and make that happen and figure out all those bits and pieces — is not only a metaphor for civilization: it *is* civilization."

For most of the many thousands of years that humans have grown grain, each family or community would grow enough to meet its own needs — primarily because the machinery and transportation technology didn't exist to allow us to grow, harvest or ship larger-scale crops.

But that changed in North America in the latter half of the 19th century. Industrial agriculture and cross-continental railways centralized grain production in the Prairie provinces and central states, where the landscape, soil and climate were ideal for efficient grain production.

Because of this cheap, reliable source of grain to supply our kitchens, we didn't just stop growing grain on the rest of the continent . . . many of us forgot that we had ever grown it in the first place. Scythes, sickles, fan mills and other staple equipment for small-scale grain production were left to rust in barns.

Today, North Americans aren't only ignorant of how to grow our own grain — most of us don't even know how to bake a loaf of bread. Growing grains and baking bread were basic skills for much of human history, and still are in many other parts of the world. Losing such skills has made us increasingly dependent on the mainstream food supply.

In the late 1800s, the whole grain flour that was a staple of North American homesteads underwent its own transformation as traditional stone mills began to be replaced by steel rollers. While steel rollers can process more grain in less time, they also produce more heat, which can make the fat in the kernel oxidize and turn rancid. Stone mills simply grind the entire kernel, but steel rollers remove the germ and bran, where much of the grain's fiber and nutrition are stored. This was good news in the 19th century because the remaining white, starchy flour was better able to survive long-distance transportation by railway and had a longer shelf life once it reached grocery stores.

After World War II, Canada and the United States began to enrich this steel-rolled flour with folic acid and other additives. The popularity of flour made it an excellent vehicle for feeding nutritional supplements to citizens.

Meanwhile, the wheat plant itself was bred and transformed to such an extent that, these days, our bodies barely recognize what we call "wheat," and some of us can no longer digest it. The industrial agriculture system has taken over every step of the seed-to-bread process.

That helplessness many of us feel when watching the sad stories of environmental, economic and social disaster on the evening news is a valid warning sign. Losing our connection with "the staff of life" is a symptom of a larger issue. Historically, whoever controlled the grain supply (and the tools for processing it) controlled the people. We've lost our control. No wonder modern-day issues, from climate change to economic

recession, leave us feeling overwhelmed: we don't even know what's in our bread these days.

Given the importance of grain to the human story, perhaps it should be no surprise that many of us who want to make a difference in the world — environmentally, economically, socially — are choosing grain as our instrument of change. When a community reclaims control over its food supply, there are numerous ripple effects and spin-off benefits. Eaters fall in love with, and choose to purchase, local food. Farmers gain a new market due to increased demand and enjoy the higher profit margins of selling directly to consumers. The environmental costs of transportation are eliminated, and the local economy improves because food dollars are staying in the community. Ultimately, the community becomes stronger.

The following pages tell the stories of communities from all corners of North America that decided to take back control of their daily bread. Bakers, farmers, eaters, environmentalists and entrepreneurs led these projects. Some wanted to reduce their carbon footprint, while others sought to grow their local economy. Some farmers wanted a profitable crop, while others focused on educating their customers. Some wanted to increase food security, others to connect with their community. For the most part, their strategies were successful.

While their reasons were all unique, some common themes resonate through all these tales from the frontlines of the community grain revolution.

For instance, New Brunswick's Speerville Flour Mill and the Kootenay Grain CSA prove the power we all have as eaters who vote for the food systems we want with every trip to the grocery store, restaurant order and home-cooked meal.

Many of us share a longing for community and connection. The Island Grains education project and Skowhegan, Maine's annual Kneading Conference both tapped into this need when they brought like-minded community members together to share information and learn together.

The Alaska Flour Company and Hungry Ghost Bread's Little Red Hen Project demonstrate how community sufficiency can be even more fulfilling, efficient and effective than self-sufficiency, and that the secret to local

food security is to figure out how you can play a part in your community's larger plan.

Through unusual projects such as Arizona's Heritage Grains Collaborative and the Mendocino Grain Project in California's wine country, we see how creative thinking will help us find the loopholes in our current industrial food system.

With uprisings in progress from the snowy fields of Alaska to the southern Arizona desert, we hope these stories inspire you and give you the information you need to see possibilities in your own community, to connect with other like-minded "grainies" and to start your own community grain project.

While reading, you may find yourself craving a fresh loaf of artisan bread or some quality time in your garden. If that's the case, turn to the hands-on guide section of this book, which includes an abundance of information on how to grow grains on a small scale, as well as some of the tastiest, easiest grain-based recipes from our kitchens. You're only a few grain seeds away from starting your own uprising.

Read the book. Grow grain. Join the revolution.

Local grains taste different. They taste like success.
They taste like optimism. They taste like revolution.

— Chris Hergesheimer, the Flour Peddler

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Tales from the Front Lines

Grist for the Mill — Vote with Your Fork

The success of any business depends on its customers. This is just as true for a farm as it is for a hardware store. It doesn't matter how cooperative the weather is, or how well a farmer plans, or whether they weed at exactly the right time. In the end, if not enough people buy the farm's products, the farm can't survive as a financially sustainable business.

For this reason, farmer entrepreneurs are always trying to figure out what their customers want. Do consumers prefer salad greens or lettuce? Turkey or chicken? With limited time and land, farmers need to grow the right crops, and once they get their wares to the farmers market or grocery store, they need someone to buy them.

In a farmer's world, the customer is everything. Yet, many of us think we are powerless. We're not. We hold all the power.

The 100-Mile Diet, James B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith's book about their attempt to eat only food produced within 100 miles of their Vancouver apartment, triggered a renaissance of local eating. And yet, while on a book tour in August 2007, MacKinnon told a Creston Valley

audience: "We had no idea that we could have that kind of direct impact just as consumers on what's being grown."

Amazing things can happen when consumers realize we have power.

Michael Pollan tells readers to vote with their forks in his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma.* Buying kale at a farm stand, for example, isn't just a healthy choice; it's also a political, economic and environmental choice. When you look at it that way, kale becomes a lot sexier.

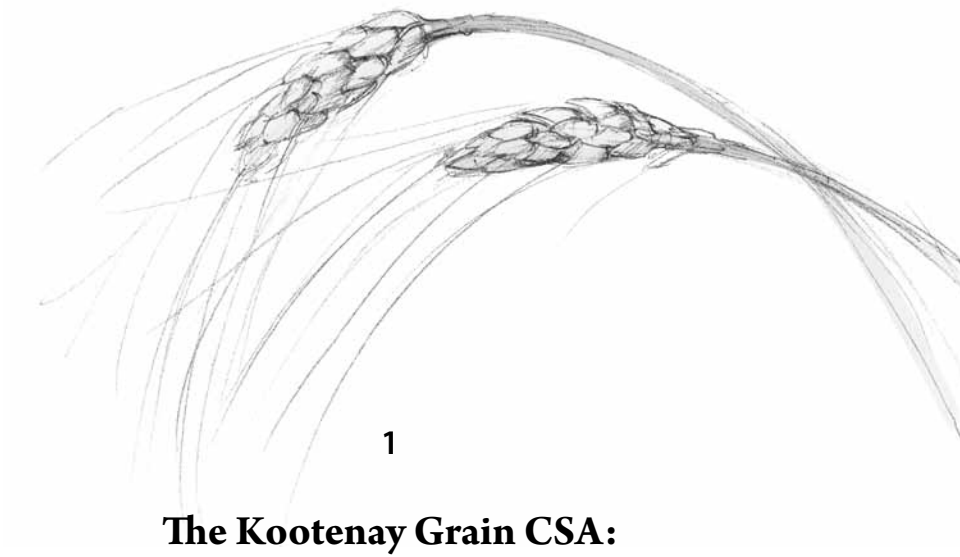
It's true: each of us votes multiple times a day for the food system we want. Agriculture has significant impacts on our environment, economy and health. If we want clean drinking water for our community, we can choose to buy from farms that don't spray chemicals and that plant cover crops to prevent runoff in the rainy season. If we want to support our local economy, we can commit to spending the majority of our grocery dollars on local food from local stores.

As customers, we can even use our purchasing power to force stores to offer local products, like the loyal and influential customers of the Speerville Flour Mill. The mill's devoted customers are one of the key reasons this mill in Atlantic Canada continues to hold its own as a financially stable business after more than 30 years.

If you believe you can't make a difference as just one person at the grocery store's check-out line, think again. The Speerville Flour Mill is a success story, even though its products are purchased by only one to two percent of the local population. That one to two percent makes enough of a difference to keep the mill, its employees and 25 organic farmers hard at work.

On the other hand, a decline in customers can turn an innovative project that made news across the country into a memory. While the Kootenay Grain CSA continues to grow and supply local grain, the lack of support from CSA members and volunteer organizers has made it a shadow of its original self.

We all eat, and therefore we all get a vote. What are you voting for today?



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The Kootenay Grain CSA: Growing Grains to Leave a Smaller Carbon Footprint

To produce our own food is the beginning of independence.
To accept that responsibility is the first step toward real freedom.

— Gene Logsdon

The Kootenay Grain CSA began with a book: *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* by Alisa Smith and James B. MacKinnon. Published in Canada in March 2007 and in the United States in April 2008 (under the title *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally*), the book describes a young couple's year of eating only foods grown within 100 miles of their apartment in Vancouver, British Columbia, on Canada's West Coast.

Their 100-mile radius included the Lower Mainland, the southern half of Vancouver Island, the Salish Sea between the two areas and Washington State's Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

The book was timely, aligning with a growing interest in farmers markets and the locavore movement. (Barbara Kingsolver's book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, written with Steven L. Hopp and

Camille Kingsolver, was released shortly thereafter, with a similar theme of eating locally — but from a hobby farmer's perspective.)

Smith and MacKinnon's book inspired a swell of interest in local food, including "100-mile diet challenges" in communities across North America, with participants committing to eating only foods grown or produced within a set region.

Enter Matt Lowe.

Lowe, an environmental activist, was one of 150 Nelson, BC, residents who signed up for the area's "eat local" challenge in August of 2007. A member of the West Kootenay EcoSociety at the time, the environmental angle of eating locally appealed to him.

"I became interested in the idea of how we can be as sustainable as possible on a local level," he says. "This [eat local challenge] was manageable, as opposed to taking on all the problems in the world, which just seemed overwhelming."

Lowe committed to eating foods grown within 100 miles of Nelson for one day a week for a month. Like Smith and MacKinnon in Vancouver, he soon realized that his normal diet heavily depended on grains, and that locally grown grains were not at all easy to find. Lowe learned that most grains in his and his neighbors' cupboards had traveled an average of 930 miles.

Ironically, the fertile soils of the Creston Valley — only 77 miles away — had once produced award-winning grains. But many years ago, when

A Grain of History

During one of the CSA's farm tours, Tammy Hardwick, manager of the Creston Museum, told the story of Mrs. Amy Kelsey of Erickson, BC. She was the first woman ever to win the World Wheat King title in 1957. They were forced to change the victor's title to World Wheat Queen for the year. Much to the chagrin of organizers, Mrs. Kelsey went on to win again in 1958. She was banned from competition the following year when officials implemented a rule requiring a minimum growing area. It turns out that Mrs. Kelsey had been growing her award-worthy wheat in a small plot in her back garden.

the Canadian Wheat Board started setting quotas for their grain elevators, Creston Valley grain farmers found they were producing too much grain for the silos to take and so the surplus was left to rot in the fields.

As a result, by the 1970s farmers were growing other crops. By 2008, when Lowe had his sights set on local grain, he learned that the small amounts still being grown in the area were only for livestock feed.

Inspired and curious as to whether grains for human consumption could be grown in the region once again, Lowe contacted Brenda Bruns, a friend who lived in Creston and was involved in various community food initiatives.

Together, Bruns and Lowe surveyed some farmers in the Creston Valley and confirmed that there was indeed interest in growing grains again. Because of the area's mild climate, fertile soil and long frost-free

Fig. 1.1: *Kootenay Grain CSA shareholders touring Keith Huscroft's farm, one of the project's three growers, in 2008.* (Credit: Lorne Eckersley, *Creston Valley Advance*)

growing season, the Creston Valley is an agricultural paradise. They didn't think the actual growing of grains would be a problem.

All the pair needed were farmers willing to experiment and folks willing to buy local grain. Bruns and Lowe decided to bring these two groups together.

The first formal planning meeting was held in December 2007. Fourteen eager organizers from the town of Nelson and the nearby Creston Valley attended, including three farmers who were interested in being growers for the project.

"We were all coming to the meeting with the same good intention," Lowe recalls.

The committee decided to model the project as a community supported agriculture (CSA) program — and the Kootenay Grain CSA became the first grain CSA in Canada. With the CSA model, customers sign up and pay before a farmer plants his or her crops, so the farmer can match supply to meet demand. The up-front payment helps farmers pay their bills at a time of year when there is usually no product to sell and tangible income is often hard to come by. The funds are often used to purchase seeds and equipment, and invest in farm infrastructure such as fences and irrigation.

Then, during the course of the harvest season, members are rewarded for their early contributions with a share of the harvest as crops mature.

Risky Business

There are many factors in farming that are beyond a farmer's control, such as weather. And there are other risks that the farmer can try to mitigate, such as preventing pests and diseases by growing healthy plants and planting a variety of crops, so that if one fails, there is another to replace it.

The CSA model requires trust from its shareholders. They have to trust that the quality of the farmer's food will be worth their investment. It also requires some degree of confidence from the farmer. Farmers commit to a certain variety, quantity and quality of goods. If they don't follow through on that commitment, they will disappoint, and likely lose, their shareholders.