

Sustainable Industries



The Grand Central Bakery flour silo is filled with local flour.

Local flour rises to the occasion

by Charles Redell - 9.22.09

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Any bread maker knows not all flour is created equal. Portland-based [Grand Central Bakery](#) says consistent quality, reduced emissions and predictable prices are among the reasons why it is now exclusively using locally produced flour from [Shepherd's Grain](#).

The organization comprised of eastern Washington wheat farmers committed to no-till farming and direct seed planting is certified by [Food Alliance](#). Grand Central is among many food producers working to [source from as many local, sustainable producers](#) as possible.

Direct-seed producers such as Shepherd's Grain members traverse their fields two less times than conventional wheat growers, using less fuel, says Bob Kerr, Grand Central Bakery's business manager. Members' no-till farming techniques reduce erosion, he adds.

“Several people from the Grand Central team toured a couple of farms in eastern Washington and were impressed by these third-generation farmers who had seen the light,” Kerr says. “The soil in their fields looked more like a backyard garden rather than the flour-like soil of the conventional fields.”

Kerr says the decision to stop using commodity flour, which spiked to \$47 in 2007, would allow Grand Central to closely control the quality of its main ingredient.

The current cost of Shepherd's Grain flour is about \$22 per 100 pounds, which is more expensive than commodity flour—currently about \$20 per 100 pounds, according to Ben Davis, Grand Central's president. Shepherd's Grain's price because it is pegged to the actual cost of production, should remain steady over time, Davis says.

The company, which has eight store locations in Portland and Seattle and sells bread to grocery stores, in 2008 had \$14 million combined sales.