



FOOD SYSTEMS

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Colorado Producers During COVID-19:

A closer look at **the Colorado Grain Chain**

www.coloradograinchain.com/

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought on many unexpected challenges to producers and food supply chains across Colorado. This fact sheet series provides an in-depth look at changes and adaptations experienced by commodity groups and individual producers.

The Colorado Grain Chain (CGC) is a non-profit organization comprising “locally-owned and-operated businesses and consumers that produce and support grain and grain products from heritage, ancient and locally-adapted grain.” The organization promotes member businesses and raises awareness of Colorado grain products. Its 24 members represent educators, farmers, bakers, pasta makers, millers, chefs, brewers and distillers across Colorado. Consumers become members to support and take advantage of educational resources that connect them to the Colorado Grain Chain such as the [Grain Home School](#).



Photo courtesy of: Colorado Grain Chain

Grain Chain Goals

- Build relationships and create community connections.
- Shorten the grain chain and support the local economy.
 - Heal the soil.
- Advocate for superior nutrition and flavor.

Provided by coloradograinchain.com

One goal of the CGC is rural revitalization. President and Chair of the CGC [Andy Clark](#), explained they hope to help revive Colorado family farms that grow organic and regenerative-farmed grains of older and regionally adapted varieties. Clark said 200 years ago, America had about 1,400 mills, and now the industry is much more consolidated. He believes smaller-scale flour mills and specialized equipment for planting, harvesting, cleaning and storing heritage grain are vital infrastructure that help local grain chains flourish.

In February 2020, Clark opened a non-profit mill in Boulder County called the Mill Site, with a goal to distribute local grain as cost-effectively as possible, while also supporting immigrant labor. In the back of the Mill Site is a wholesale granary available for farmers to process their crops, and a bulk department in the front, with heritage grains available by the scoop.

The CGC is partnering with [Mad Agriculture](#) (a nonprofit based out of Boulder that works to support farm finance, farm planning, and crop and carbon markets) for seed testing. In 2019, 50-60 varieties of grain were planted by CGC members, 12 of which went through baking tests at Moxie Bread Co., the bakery owned by Clark. Lab work was done to see protein and pollen numbers, with yield and taste being important factors as well.

An uncommon variety of wheat named Indian Jammu was considered the “winner” from these baking and lab tests, and is now being promoted by the CGC.

CGC farmer members sell through a variety of markets, including direct to consumers at venues such as farmers markets, direct to wholesale clients such as bakeries or restaurants, or a mix of both. Those producers growing buckwheat, millet, and oat sell a majority of their harvest directly to malting companies.

“Farm [members] are open to sell into any markets, for the most part,” Clark said. “If they can find relationships where they can deliver large quantities - 2,000 lb. totes/pallets - they will.”

Millers play a key role because they are advocating for home bakers and small shops to buy a home mill, something Clark said is gaining in popularity and provides farmers with access to emerging markets.

COVID-19 Impact

According to member and vice chair of the CGC, Roy Pfaltzgraff, the COVID-19 impact on grain farmers depends on the individual farmer. Clark reported that most northern Colorado farm members planned to sell at farmer’s markets and through restaurants in 2020. When social distancing was recommended, CGC farm members had to get more creative and sought new markets such as roadside and pop up stands and collaboration with other businesses. Moxie Bread Co., for example, is a partner of CGC and owned by Clark, with high foot traffic and a loyal clientele. When social distancing measures hit, they started selling “farm boxes” through their online store – featuring local produce, butter, eggs, flour, bread, and meat. These curated boxes have been popular, but there is still a stress about the produce and grain that is to come in the fall.

“The biggest shift we see with food supply chains is people buying local. I think the interconnectedness will be a long-lasting supply chain benefit, and will take away the romanticized notion of buying local and turning it to a pragmatic and practical affair. It makes more sense. It tastes better and fresher, and it’s way more fun.”
–Andy Clark, Baker and Owner of Moxie Bread Co.

Clark, who is also the baker and owner of Moxie Bread Co, worries, however, that these marketing innovations may not be enough, and that the pandemic may bring mental health issues to farmers and food producers.

Colorado Grain Chain member Dan Hobbs is the owner/operator of Hobbs and Meyer Farms and the Pueblo Food & Seed Co. The farm grows heritage grains, garlic, pepper and seeds. Hobbs said the pandemic has caused an increase in housing costs for the farm to keep a small number of essential farm workers on the property. Although Hobbs' farm was able to increase the number of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares they sold which generated more income, they also had additional costs associated with implementing health and safety measures. For example, they purchased washable shopping bags for customers.

Hobbs has seen little supply chain disruption as a seed producer, because his business is self-contained and they don't bring in outside seed. But for those grain farmers who purchased seed from non-local companies, he said many faced delayed shipments, due to national seed companies being "slammed" with business, to the point of home gardening sales being cut off in favor of commercial farm sales.

He explained there has been price disruption on the wholesale/retail produce side but less so for grain. Contracts that Hobbs' farm had with institutions, foodservice and restaurants were cancelled, but the demand for grain and feedstuff has remained strong. Seed sales for the farm increased 180% in the past few months, with sales going to five national seed companies and individual farmers and gardeners through the farm's [website](#). They attribute the growth to increased interest in growing food at home.

Looking towards the future...

Hobbs said despite the extra work involved, one thing consumers should do is commit to durable relationships with producers, and not just for the short term.

"We hope consumers embrace family farms for long-term food safety and security," Hobbs said. "These local farms won't look like a traditional supply chain, so there needs to be education so that consumers will know how alternative value chains work."

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