

## Freshly milled flour adds flavor, nutrition to holiday baking

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### Flour is often taken for granted.

Remember, just a few months ago the sheltering housebound were shocked to find none on the grocery shelves just as the urge to bake surged.

Since then, some have changed the way they regard this basic but crucial recipe ingredient. They turned to local Wisconsin flour producers or even began milling their own flour at home so as not to rely on typical Big Food supply chains.

“It was a major, big wake-up call,” said Dave Meuer, farmer and miller at Meuer Farm in the Town of Brothertown near Chilton. Meuer said his ancient grains and flour sales doubled and at times tripled in 2020 as the demand skyrocketed for local foods.

“People were just panicking,” he said. “People want fresh. People want local. More and more people are going back to cooking and baking.”

Right now, flour takes on even more importance with holiday baking in full swing. It’s a good time to assess flour availability and quality. Flours are not all alike and drastically differ in freshness, flavor, nutrition, protein content, consistency and baking uses.

There is much to learn about flour. It is one of the last ingredients bakers should take for granted.

### A living thing

Turns out, whole grains, called berries, are shelf stable. But those same berries ground into flour are not.

Whole grain flour is highly perishable, so Meuer grinds only enough to meet demand. His flour is only a few days old when he sells it.

“Flour is a living thing,” said Meuer, a fourth-generation farmer. “So, we try to keep it alive.”

Meuer and his wife, Leslie, grow, harvest, stone-mill and sell a wide variety of flours including rye, spelt, soft red winter wheat, oat, durum, einkorn, emmer and corn for polenta. They also sell berries for home grinding.

The farm specializes in ancient grains, some so time-honored they are found in the Old Testament. Einkorn was developed 13,000 years ago and helped start this thing we call farming. “It’s the oldest grain ever grown by man,” Meuer said.

Meuer said his personal favorites are spelt (he calls it the ultimate flour) and einkorn, a flour he said promotes gut health and is tolerated by some of his customers who avoid gluten.

Meuer sells berries and flour at the Milwaukee Winter Farmers Market, or online at [meuerfarm.com](http://meuerfarm.com). Direct pickup at the farm, N2564 Highway 151, is available, too. They also usually appear at the Kohler Holiday Market (canceled for 2020), Garden & Landscape Expo in Madison (it’s virtual in February 2021) and Tosa Farmers Market.

### Huge difference

Some bakers may not be accustomed to using whole-grain flour.

The difference between whole-grain and all-purpose flour is huge, said Charlie Tennesen, a heritage wheat farmer and miller at Anarchy Acres in Mount Pleasant. Tennesen focuses on wheats that were once commonly grown in Wisconsin.



He explained that when food started to become industrialized prior to the 1900s, flour, milk and eggs were developed in powdered form so they could be shipped long distance via railroad and not spoil. With flour, the nutritious, flavorful and perishable bran and germ were stripped away to extend its shelf life, producing white or all-purpose flour.

Before that, people ground their own at home or sought local millers for fresh flour.

As for powdered eggs and milk, they fell out of food favor for their inferior quality. In stark contrast, all-purpose flour has become ubiquitous.

“The white flour, we kept. It’s like eating a powdered egg,” Tennessen said.

A similar freshness and flavor comparison could be made with coffee. Nowadays, many wouldn’t dream of buying a 5-pound bag of coffee that was ground months or even years ago. Savvy coffee lovers know that once ground, the beans start to degrade — not unlike whole grains. Imagine what a Sanka instant coffee drinker in the 1970s would have thought of modern coffee choices.

### **Turkey Red and more**

Like Meuer, Tennessen at Anarchy Acres witnessed a “huge increase in demand” for his flour this year.

Tennessen specializes in Wisconsin Pedigree No. 2 flour, a type of Turkey Red wheat that was developed at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1900s. He also sells Red Fife, a hard spring wheat that was grown in Wisconsin beginning in the 1860s.

“It has a taste profile similar to Turkey, but there are floral tones I can’t quite describe,” Tennessen said. “It rises higher than our Turkey flour and makes a stronger dough.”

Another wheat called Marquis sells out every September in about six weeks, so contact him in summer for a stash of Marquis in 2021.

The majority of wheat that was grown in Wisconsin during the 1920s was Marquis, according to the Anarchy Acres website. “For many years, it was the standard for a high-quality milling flour,” it reads. “Flavor is subtle but rich, and among heritage flours it is probably the easiest we have found to work with.”

Other than online at [anarchyacres.com](http://anarchyacres.com), Tennessen’s flour can be found at Malicki’s Piggly Wiggly, 5201 Washington Ave. in Racine, and Molbeck’s Health & Spice Shop, 3212 Washington Ave. in Racine. Anarchy Acres also sells berries for grinding; contact Tennessen as they are not listed on the website.

His Wisconsin Pedigree No. 2 wheat berries can be found at Outpost Natural Foods bulk area, listed as #653 Turkey Red wheat berries (heirloom).

Outpost also sells other bulk berries ready for grinding from other producers, such as organic soft white winter wheat berries, organic rye berries and organic spelt berries.

### **Tips for using fresh flour**

All-purpose 5-pound flour “bricks” often list best-by dates several months or even a couple of years out. The labels rarely disclose the date of milling, so it’s difficult to determine how old the flour is when you use it.

In addition to Anarchy Acres and Meuer Farm, other Wisconsin flour producers that disclose their milling dates are Lonesome Stone Milling in Lone Rock, available at Metcalfe’s Market and other retailers, and Meadowlark Organics in Ridgeway. Madison Sourdough in Madison is another flour purveyor that stone-mills Wisconsin-grown grains and is transparent about dates.

At home, keep flour in an airtight container to keep out humidity and bugs. Store it in the refrigerator or freezer to preserve nutrition and flavor, according to both Tennessen and Meuer. Tennessen said it should be good up to a year in the freezer.

Above all, start experimenting in the kitchen. Recipes are plentiful online at Anarchy Acres, Meuer Farm, [Meadowlark Organics](http://MeadowlarkOrganics) and [Lonesome Stone Milling](http://LonesomeStoneMilling) websites. [Breadtopia.com](http://Breadtopia.com) also lists recipes and berries for sale with best ways to introduce whole-grain flour into your meals.

For help with baking specific items, converting recipes or questions on getting started, a good resource is home milling groups on social media, such as [Milling Whole Grain Goodness](http://MillingWholeGrainGoodness) and [Everything Mockmill\(ed\)](http://EverythingMockmill(ed)).

“Don’t leave it around! Stick it in pancakes, stick it in bread, pasta, dumplings and cookies,” Tennessen advised.

The flour from Anarchy Acres is sold as 92% extraction, which means 8% of the larger bran bits are sifted out. This makes Anarchy’s flour mostly whole grain yet “more approachable” for those used to all-purpose flour.

Home millers can also purchase screens to sift flour at home. Passing the flour through a fine mesh screen will result in a finer flour but with much of the nutrition still intact when compared with all-purpose flour. Even a colander may work in a pinch. Or, mill the flour twice for a finer pastry flour for pie crusts and cakes.

Unsifted whole grain flour is “more hard-core,” according to Tennessen, yet perfectly good in cookies, pancakes, muffins, scones, etc., if a coarser grind is acceptable.

Meuer suggested home bakers and pasta makers try substituting half of the all-purpose with whole grain flour in recipes.

He also recommended bakers try rye flour, something commonly associated with bread. “Rye is so much more than that,” he said, and encouraged bakers try it in cookies. Rye flour has a bran so small you can’t sift it and a slight green color, he explained, not dark brown like typical rye bread.

Fresh whole flour may also be more absorbent and need additional time to rest or ferment, particularly with bread dough but not for things like cookies. Meuer said many of his customers plan a long fermentation period for yeast bread. “You mix it up one day and bake it the next day,” he advised.

#### **Flour renaissance?**

Consumers are increasingly seeking fresh, local foods such as eggs, dairy, meat and produce.

Is a flour renaissance far behind?

Maybe someday, specialty flour shops will become hip with dozens of fresh “forgotten” grains ready to mill into custom, small-batch flours to take home. Turkey Red, einkorn, white Sonora, kamut, hard white, rye, durum, soft white, Red Fife and emmer may someday become familiar names and readily available. Home bakers and pasta makers will know their preferences and what works best in their kitchen.

Come what may, flour may never be taken for granted any time soon. “It’s a unique time in history for flour,” Tennessen said.