

Wheat



Wheat is a grain plant. It produces a dry, edible seed called a kernel. The wheat kernel is what we use to make food products. There are five classes of wheat planted in the United States. These classes have different varieties of wheat that are grown for specific characteristics.

Soft red winter wheat is the type of wheat grown in Illinois. This class of wheat can be used to make cakes, cookies and crackers. Farmers in Illinois harvest around 750,000 acres of wheat each year which can produce up to 66 million bushels! That's 3.96 billion pounds of wheat!



Wheat was originally a wild grass. In 1777, it was grown only as a hobby crop. Today, the U.S. is one of the largest exporters of wheat. Each year around 37.2 million acres of wheat is planted and harvested. That means U.S. production can create 118.8 billion pounds of flour each year. However, wheat grown around the U.S. goes into more than just flour. You can find wheat in animal feed, medications and more!



Millers grind wheat kernels into fine powder to make wheat flour. Wheat flour contains a protein substance called gluten. Wheat flour is great for baking because the gluten makes the dough elastic. The wheat germ and wheat germ oil are derived from the wheat kernel and are used to improve the flavor and nutritional value of foods. Wheat germ oil has over 100% of the daily value for Vitamin E per teaspoon.



Meet the Harvel Family

Harvel Farms Inc. | Clay City, IL

What is the coolest thing about your farm?

Our family farm is located in Clay City. We farm in Wayne, Richland and Clay counties. I like that our farm is family oriented. A real place where we get to build something, watch things grow and make our own decisions about how the land is used. I enjoy the seasonal rhythm of farming. Cattle being fed while crops go in and come out, wheat growing through the winter, and a farm changing dramatically from season to season – a pretty typical southern Illinois grain farm– but with a lot more going on than someone driving past it would realize.

What does harvest look like at your farm?

Harvest is a busy time on our farm! We generally have two combines working in the wheat field for harvest. The wheat drill, a machine that plants wheat seeds in the soil, is not far behind the combines. Once the wheat is harvested, we deliver it to Siemer Milling in Teutopolis. Siemer has been part of the community since 1882 and works with farmers to turn wheat into flour and other wheat products. Our wheat is tested when it arrives, then cleaned and milled into ingredients that can be used in foods like breads, cookies, crackers, cakes and pastries.

What is something you wish more consumers understood about farming and the people behind their food?

I want consumers to know how much passion, care, and work goes into our wheat crop. What might look like a simple field represents months of work, generations of knowledge, and food that will eventually reach someone's table. From planting and spraying to harvesting and storing, our family takes pride in getting it right. Farming is more than a job. It means early mornings, late nights, watching the weather, making decisions with thousands of dollars on the line, and hoping everything comes together. It also means sacrifice, but harvest makes it all worthwhile. I'm proud to grow wheat that helps feed families across the country while making the most of our soil. Farming is about being a good steward of the land today so it can continue producing for generations to come.



Generations of the family working together.



All photos on this page courtesy of Jamie Harvel