

Providing Nutritious Food While Preserving The Land

By Ed Stroesser

Where does your food come from? Who are the farmers that grow the crops that eventually find their way onto your dinner table? We invite you to meet some of the farmers of Northarvest who grow dry beans and other commodities. In this article they explain how they do it—and why.

Webster Farms

What would you do with 8,000 acres of land near Devils Lake, North Dakota? Dan and Doreen Webster put this huge natural resource to work growing just about every crop in the book— corn, soybeans, canola, dry beans, wheat, barley, and flax.

Dan's a third generation farmer from Churchs Ferry, North Dakota and Doreen is from Huntington Beach, located along the Pacific Ocean in sunny California. This marriage of two unique cultures has grown into a strong family farm operation in east central North Dakota.

"It was all a learning experience for me, coming from the city and moving up to North Dakota on a farm," Doreen said. "It was a culture shock, you might say, but I've learned to really love it and appreciate it.



Doreen and Dan Webster and family.

"Before, I never really thought about how my food got to the grocery store, where now I do understand all of that and what it takes to get it there, and it's quite the process," she said.

Dan and Doreen have also raised a

family on Webster Farms. All four daughters have worked the farm, each having learned how to run combine. Dan said he'd love it if they all came back to the farm, but added that he realizes they're probably not all going to marry someone who wants to farm. "But they're always going to have that knowledge to fall back on of growing up on a farm. It'll always be in them," he said.

Even now, the girls love the farm, Doreen said. "They like to visit California, too," she added. "But North Dakota is home to them."

After inheriting the homeland from his dad and his grandpa, Dan said he feels a responsibility to take care of it. "As farmers, we want to maintain the health of the soil because that's how we make our living," he said. "We're always

RDs: Earn CPEUs at April Seminar in Austin

Registered dietitians can earn up to five continuing professional education units at a seminar sponsored by the Northarvest Bean Growers Association. The "Beans For A Better Life" seminar is set for April 27, 2012 in Austin, Texas.

The seminar will feature the latest research about the impact of bean consumption on human health. Dr. Joanne Slavin, PhD, RD, University of Minnesota, who served on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, will address the latest studies on dry beans and human health, as well as the latest DGA recommendations.

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trying to do what's best for the land. We have some fields that raise certain crops better than other crops, depending on drainage or alkaline or salt or whatever the issue. You're always trying to do what's best for the soil and for the crop.

"The ultimate goal is to produce a high quality food; that's the end game."

Another goal is to pass along the land to the next generation. "We have four daughters,

"The ultimate goal is to produce a high quality food; that's the end game."

and we also have sons-in-law," Dan said. One son-in-law is already working on the farm.

"You always think about the generation that came before you and try to preserve the land for the future," Dan said. "That's one of my dreams is to have the farm go on for another 100 years."

Sandhill Dairy

Mark Dombeck is a fourth generation farmer who runs Sandhill Dairy, a multi-family farming operation in west central Minnesota, near Perham. Dombeck's ancestors immigrated from Germany in 1874.

"Everything we do here is science-based," Dombeck said. He explained that the day-to-day operation of the 2,000 acre farm is based on laboratory tests and carefully studied data.

For example, he computes his irrigation needs with the help of a computer software program that reports how much moisture plants have used, based on the temperature and wind speed of the previous day. He uses this data to determine whether to water more or less.

Dombeck said, "Our slogan around here is, 'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. You can't manage it, if you don't measure it.'"

Two sons and a son-in-law help manage Sandhill Dairy, along with seven other staff. They milk 350 cows, three times a day, and generate more than three semi-tankers full of milk every week. They also grow alfalfa, corn, soybeans, and dry beans.

Dombeck said he prepares a careful plan of feeding for his milk cows. Everything is computerized to give the livestock a perfect balance of exactly what they need, with daily computer printouts providing a guide to each animal's diet. "I would think this is similar to a dietitian developing a carefully-planned diet for a client," Dombeck said.

"It's also similar to the labeling on products in the grocery store," Dombeck said. "We keep records on what each cow eats every day." He said that exhaustive farm records show the history of his livestock, including pedigrees and ancestry. Through DNA testing, he can determine what each animal will become, at



The Sandhill Dairy team: (l. to r.) Steve Dombeck, Bob Dombeck, Mark Dombeck, and Jeremy Lachowitz.

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what age it will begin to give milk, and special diet needs it might have along the way.

Dombeck said that he has visited farms in China and found that the United States food supply is much safer. “Everything here is traceable,” he said. “We have to report everything we use on the fields, all crop inputs, even irrigation water. Every load of milk is tested in the lab.”

It’s all about safety, he said. “We have a very safe, nutritious, and accountable food system in the U.S.”

Pine Breeze Farms

Jon Ewy is a first generation farmer at Pine Breeze Farms near Deer Creek, in west central Minnesota. He and his family have farmed 1,600 acres since 1978.

The Ewys grow corn, dry beans, soybeans, and alfalfa. They also raise 450 head of Holstein replacement heifers.

Ewy (pronounced Ay – vee) said the soil on his farm is perfect for growing dry beans. “We’re on a light, sandy soil which makes for excellent dry bean raising,” he said. “We can put out a real top quality product on this type of soil.” He raises dark red and light red kidney beans.

“I think we’re all doing a very good job of doing our best to guarantee that the consumer has the best product,” Ewy said. “All of us farmers in the Northarvest area do things pretty much alike,” he said. “We are all using best management practices, things that will insure that the product we are marketing is as wholesome as possible.

“None of us want to waste any crop inputs,” he said. “Everything is done according to the results of our soil testing. We follow the best management practices as far as weed control and insect control, to make sure everything is done according to how the USDA says how and when we should apply it.”

Ewy said that his wife Margaret grew up on a farm in North Dakota and loves the farm life. “The thing she likes best about the farm is just being in touch with the land, the livestock, and the wildlife; she really enjoys that,” he said.

Pine Breeze Farms provides food and shelter for deer and other animals, Ewy said. He also employs a careful combination of crop rotation and minimum till or mulch till on his fields to minimize soil erosion.

Ewy is grooming a young partner in the farming operation to eventually become a full partner at Pine Breeze Farms. “Maybe some time down the road I’ll have some grandchildren that might want to come and farm, but that’s a few years down the road,” he said. 

Beans and Flatulence: Unfounded Fear or Fact of Life?

By **Andrea Hutchins, PhD, RD**

Dry beans are a versatile, nutrient-packed powerhouse that consumers may not eat as frequently as recommended (up to 3 cups each week) due to the fear that they will experience excessive intestinal gas or flatulence. For a majority of consumers the fear of flatulence may be unfounded.

A recent study published in the Nutrition Journal (<http://www.nutritionj.com/content/10/1/128>) reported the results from three studies during which participants completed a weekly questionnaire to assess gastrointestinal discomfort issues such as increased flatulence, stool changes, and bloating. Healthy adults between the ages of 26 and 57 ate ½ cup of pinto beans, baked beans, black eye peas, or controls (canned green beans, canned carrots, or chicken soups) every day for 8 to 12 weeks. Less than half of the participants reported increased flatulence during the first week of the study diets. By the second or third week of bean consumption 70% or more of the participants felt that any increase in flatulence had dissipated. Interestingly, 3–11% of the participants reported increased flatulence even when eating the control foods that did not contain any known flatulence-producing compounds.

For people that experience an initial increase in flatulence, eating smaller portions of beans at first, soaking and rinsing dry beans before cooking, and rinsing canned beans can help. After two to three weeks of consistent bean consumption, most people perceive that their flatulence rate returns to normal.

About the Author

Dr. Andrea Hutchins is an Associate Professor of Nutrition in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. She is also a member of the Bean Institute’s editorial board.



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A panel of RDs will relate how they use research data in their practice and how they communicate to their clients through traditional and social media. The panel will include Maureen Murtaugh, PhD, RD, University of Utah; Robin Plotkin, RD, Dallas, TX; and Janice Bissex, MS, RD, of The Meal Makeover Moms. Bissex will also explain how The Meal Makeover Moms offer cooking and nutrition advice to their followers on Facebook and Twitter, and through traditional media, as well.


In addition, Chef Ann Cooper, school food service director from Boulder, Colorado, will serve a “school lunch” to participants. Cooper will address the importance of healthy meals for children and adults, including the economic benefits of doing so. She will also lead a cooking demonstration and tasting of several dry bean recipes.

The seminar will be held at the University of Texas Commons Learning Center at the J. J. Pickle Research Campus.

Early registration is just \$49.95 through March 30, 2012. Registration from March 31 to April 23 is \$59.95. Cost at

the door is \$75. The “school lunch” is included in the registration fee.

Registration is available online at www.beaninstitute.com.

For more information about the “Beans For A Better Life” seminar, contact Ed Stroesser at 1 (800) 772-8447. 

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