

Spelt

Marketing and Market Outlook

Spelt is a subspecies of wheat that is primarily used as an alternative feed grain for livestock. It is generally grown for on-farm use, often as a substitute for oats. Most of the nation's feed-grade spelt is grown in Ohio.

Spelt can also be used in many of the same processed foods as soft red winter wheat (for example, pasta, high fiber cereals and crackers). Some people with allergies to wheat are not allergic to spelt, making spelt an excellent substitute for wheat in their diets. Spelt products are available through organic and health food stores.

The use of spelt as a food grain is a growing market. Most food-grade spelt is grown on contract with a processing company. Purity Foods, Inc., a Michigan-based company, specializes in organic and natural food products and is one of the main marketers for spelt flours and pastas. Growers interested in producing a specialty grain will need to contact current processors for contract feasibility.

Production Considerations

Site selection and planting

Like winter wheat, spelt is seeded in the fall and harvested the following summer. It is generally more winter hardy than many soft red winter wheat varieties. Unlike many other grains, spelt can be grown on low fertility soils that are poorly drained. It also grows well on sandy soils. Management is similar to that of wheat, although spelt requires less nitrogen per



acre than wheat. Spelt is a common rotational crop on organic farms; however, it should not be planted following other cereal grains.

Pest management

Spelt is considered highly susceptible to loose smut, making a fungicide application necessary. Reports on spelt's susceptibility to powdery mildew and stem/leaf rust are mixed. Hessian fly, greenbug and wheat stem sawfly are the main insects that attack spelt. The thick seed husk provides spelt with some protection from pollutants and storage insects. Weed control begins with managing weeds in the previous crop. Additional strategies include tillage and establishing a dense stand so that spelt is able to compete well with weeds.

Harvest and storage

Spelt can be direct combined or windrowed and threshed, similar to winter wheat. Drying and storage is also similar to wheat. Unlike wheat, the tough hull remains on the spelt kernel through harvest, shipping and storage. Seed intended for animal feed is ground or milled before use. Spelt seeds that



will be processed for human consumption are mechanically de-hulled just prior to milling. This additional step makes spelt more difficult and expensive to process than wheat.

Labor requirements

Labor needs for spelt production and harvest are approximately two to three hours per acre. Additional labor is needed to de-hull or grind spelt prior to use.

Economic Considerations

Since most food-grade spelt is grown on contract with a processing company, having a contract in place before raising spelt is necessary for a return on investment. Production costs for spelt are expected to be similar to oats and barley, with variable costs of \$75 to \$110 per acre and fixed costs of about \$80. Returns for conventional spelt are estimated at \$80 to \$120 above variable costs. Organic spelt could bring a higher return, possibly as much as \$250 per acre above variable costs. Transportation expenses to an out-of-state buyer, which are not included in these estimates, could significantly decrease returns.

More Information

- Grain Crops: Spelt (University of Kentucky)
<http://www.uky.edu/Ag/GrainCrops/spelt.htm>
- Profiles in Agricultural Entrepreneurship: Purity Foods, Inc., Okemos, MI (University of Kentucky, 2000)
http://www.uky.edu/Ag/AgEcon/pubs/ext_aec/ext2001-05.pdf
- Alternative Field Crops Manual: Spelt (University of Wisconsin and University of Minnesota, 1990)
<http://newcrop.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/afcm/spelt.html>
- Alternative Wheat Cereals as Food Grains: Einkorn, Emmer, Spelt, Kamut and Triticale (Purdue University, 1996)
<http://www.spelt.com/spelthistory.html>
- Purity Foods
<http://www.purityfoods.com>
- Speltz Budget – Horse Drawn/Amish Practices (Ohio State University, 2003)
<http://aede.osu.edu/Programs/FarmManagement/Budgets/amish/speltz.pdf>