

# Organic Wheat/Grains Production and Marketing

Bob Quinn, Farmer, Quinn Farm and Ranch, Big Sandy, MT

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### 1) Principles of Organic Farming:

#### Diversification

- Break up disease, weed, and pest cycles

#### Soil-Building

- Feed the soil, not the plants
- Organic by neglect is soil mining and is not sustainable

#### Flexibility

- If you are not changing, you are not organic
- Respond to what happens in your field, not according to your calendar, a rigid rotation, or what all the neighbors are doing

### 2) Rules of Organic Farming

#### Keep Records

- Look for trends
- Look for cause-and-effect relationships

#### Experiment

- Try new crops
- Try new rotations
- Try new techniques
- Always use controls

#### Manage the Farm

- Walk your fields to see what is happening
- Respond to problems at the first sign of trouble
- Treat problems, not symptoms

#### Don't Forget to Market

- Sell it before you plant it
- Have a backup market
- Don't be a bank (unless you are a bank)

### 3) Advantages of Organic Farming

#### Increased Financial Stability

- Lower inputs
- Increase value of outputs
- Maintain yields

#### Increased Soil Quality

#### Increased Knowledge of All Aspects of Farming

#### Increased Fun

### 4) Disadvantages of Organic Farming

- More Management Required
- Fewer Resources for Problem-Solving

## Marketing Your Crops

### 1) Have Two to Three Possible Markets Before You Plant (i.e., plant only what you know you can sell)

- Establish price, volume, and quality requirements and other conditions mentioned below
- Get a contract if possible from one market

### 2) Take Large Representative Samples of Each Bin or Field (if you expect variation from field to field)

### 3) Send Out Samples to Prospective Buyers as Soon as Possible

- Samples MUST be representative of what you will deliver
- Keep buyers up to date on what you have available

### 4) Know Your Selling Price and Conditions of Sale

- What are the current local or regional prices?
- What price do you want or need?
- Are your quality specs adequate?
- Are discounts possible?
- Are prices on farm or delivered?
- Are prices on as-is basis or clean weight?

## About Bob Quinn

Beginning in 1978, Quinn began to look for ways to make his family's farm on the plains of Montana into a more profitable operation. The farm was certified organic in 1993 and now encompasses 4,000 acres of wheat (khorasan, durum, hard red winter, soft white) and buckwheat on 4,000 acres. He also grows barley, flax, lentils, alfalfa, and peas. In addition to production, Quinn processes and successfully direct-markets his organic grain.

Quinn's two, three, and five year rotation plans are online at the Kerr Center website, [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com)

An in-depth profile of Bob Quinn is featured in *The New*

*American Farmer*, available as a book, a CD-ROM or online at the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SARE) site [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org) Also featured in that publication are other speakers at *Future Farms 2002*: Max Carter, Diana Endicott, Greg Gunthorp, and Richard and Peggy Sechrist.

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- How are weights determined?
- Are there any payments for storage?
- When will delivery be made?
- When will payments be made?
- Do you want to go only for the top dollar?
  - More work
  - Less loyalty
  - More risk
  - More potential return
  - Harder to market quality problems
- Do you want to go with two to three long-term buying partners?
  - Less work
  - More loyalty
  - Less risk
  - More potential for steadier return
  - Easier to market quality problems

**5) Watch Out for Credit Requests** (The further it goes from home or the less you know about the buyer, the more cash you need up front and the shorter terms you should give.)

**6) Keep Your Stored Crop in Good Condition**

- Watch for bugs, rodents, birds, high moisture, high temperature, mold, and spoilage