



## Rare heritage hard wheat sprouts in Maine

Grain Alliance seed project testing varieties for New England

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of grain zealots, wheat from imported Estonian seeds is now sprouting in test plots across the state, part of a two-year trial to find what varieties of grains can grow well in Maine. The hard winter wheat called sirvinta seems to thrive here. Soon you may see even see bakers offering loaves of this nutty grain.

"Last year we harvested and replanted 150 pounds and this year we harvested almost 900 pounds," said Amber Lambke, executive director of Maine Grain Alliance and owner of Maine Grains in Skowhegan.

Under the auspices of the Alliance's Heritage Seed Restoration Project, "the idea is to get grains

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RICHARD ROBERTS,  
MAINE GRAIN ALLIANCE

growing and make them adaptable to New England," said Alliance board member Richard Roberts, who also experiments with Einkorn, Black Emmer and Danish 'Midsommer' rye, among others.

The Alliance has propagated sirvinta on small plots in Solon, Lincolnville and Parkman and now holds the largest volume of this rare, heritage seed in North America. Results of the two-year "Sirvinta in the Seed Project" will be released to Alliance members this month. The trials, from mill-

ers to bakers, were roundly successful.

"It's been 150 years since Maine was a grain producer," said Roberts, who bit by bit, seeks to restore Maine's status as the breadbasket of New England. "People are concerned with industrialized agriculture and are interested in locally grown. They would love to have another variety of winter wheat that would grow here."

Soon they might get that wish. The Alliance hopes to have sirvinta seeds certified by the state and sell them to farmers by this fall. Originally brought to Maine in 1998 by an intern working with Franklin County's "seed saver" Will Bonsall, the wheat is not yet widespread here, but it could become an important link in Maine's recharged locavore movement.

"The whole point of the Alliance is to revive the grain econo-



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Amber Lambke, president of Maine Grains grist mill, is shown with the Austrian-made stone mill used to mill grains at the Skowhegan facility.

my for human consumption," said Matt DuBois, co-owner of The Bankery in Skowhegan, where loaves made with sirvinta wheat are featured in an artisan bread

club. He is eager for more. "Once the seed stock is built up and farmers can grow it, we can expose more locals to this exciting revived grain."

## 'This is home'



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Lee Stover at home in his cabin that has no electricity or running water on his Waldo property. The 70-year-old retired forester moved into the cabin 16 years ago. He harvests logs from his property and saws lumber to sell. "There is a fair amount of effort just living [here], but I wouldn't have it any other way," he said.

## Retired forester lives off the grid in log cabin his father built

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

To get to Lee Stover's cabin in January, you have to walk half a mile or so into the woods, passing old gravel pits, towering white pines and freshly made animal tracks etched in the snow.

You know you are getting closer when the first building appears — a weathered wooden shed that shelters his red Massey Ferguson tractor. Then you spot the elaborate fence that guards the large garden plot, sleeping under its white winter blanket. Up a slight hill is his sawmill and the tall piles of new lumber seasoning in the fresh air.

Stover, 70, a retired forester, has lived on this land year-round for 16 years and has loved it all his life. His father built the log cabin from trees he felled nearby back



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Lee Stover heads to his cabin on his Waldo property. The cabin was built by his father in the 1950s and his family made many trips each year to spend time there.

"I remember coming in on snowshoes and cross-country skis," the retired forester said. "My father liked to come here because there were no ringing telephones. He could come here and do what he wanted."

For Stover, life in the woods got under his skin so he studied forestry at the University of Maine. He was hired by Georgia-Pacific Corp. to manage the paper company's vast timberlands in Washington County and put in 25 years there. He and his former wife raised their two children in Calais and always planned to retire in Waldo. They moved there in 1999, working hard to clear part of the grown-over land and to mill lumber together with the sawmill. The marriage ended but Stover stayed, working the sawmill alone. He stayed even when others may have chosen to move back to the comforts and conveniences of town.

"I have no fear," he said. "I'm not con-

cerned. You can always walk out with your snowshoes."

That desire to stay remained strong even after Stover narrowly survived a heart attack in June of 2009, during a crowded contra dance in Belfast.

"I had a pressure in my chest. Then the lights went out," he said.

His heart had stopped. The contra dance caller saw that Stover had collapsed and asked the room of dancers if there was a doctor in the hall. A nurse practitioner, an emergency medical technician and others sprang forward to administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

"Despite the CPR, I was beginning to turn gray," he said.

Then the Belfast police arrived with a defibrillator and started his heart again, saving his life.

After that, he was rushed to a hospital and underwent quadruple bypass surgery.

See Sawmill, Page C2

## A fresh, new look at home and hearth

Maine co-op program explores homemaking

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

If you live in a home, you are a homemaker," Deborah Killam declared Wednesday afternoon at the Maine Agricultural Trades Show.

There to spread the gospel of what it means to make a home in 2016, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension educator laid out a plan to assist farm families, homesteaders and urbanites alike in the dailliness of hearth and home.

"There appears to be a resurgence of interest in learning how to manage one's household or home better. People are trying to connect with others to learn, share and work together to live better lives and to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways," said Killam.

Quilting bees, garden and bridge clubs, churches and grange halls — these formed a social glue of a bygone era fading across the state. Emerging homemaker networks could fill the gap

What sprung from the 4-H circuit in the 1940s, moved into female territory and fell victim to bracketing stereotypes. A topic once reserved for women's groups is now ready for a remake.

The Maine Extension Homemakers Program seeks to extend the university's resources beyond the classroom and into the communities.

"It's a structure to support learning," said Killam, whether that's "gardening, cooking or the leisure arts." The idea is to share skills, improve community and nurture leaders.

What's on the agenda? Whatever the group decides is right. Who's invited? "Anyone who is interested in learning new information to improve their personal, family and community life," according to the Maine Extension Homemakers.

At heart, the volunteer program is rudimentary.

"You enlist the help of a person and share ideas with others," said Killam.

But there is a structure. Starting out locally, homemakers assist at food pantries or with the elderly, for example. If interest builds, they can form a county group, which is usually led by a council.

Yet for homesteaders such as Letti Harvey of Newcastle, breaking from tending to her chickens, fixing her roof and taking long walks in the woods is not easy.

"I am not a joiner," said the former sales representative, who set out to "get back to something more real and authentic," tied to the rhythms of nature.

Though technology keeps her connected to friends and family, it also isolates.

See Skills, Page C2

Watch the video  
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in 1954, when Stover was just a boy who helped peel off the bark by hand. They built it strong, to last — and it has. The sturdy logs have darkened with age but have withstood the storms of more than half a century. Inside, the 255-square foot cabin is heated only with a wood stove and lit with LED lanterns and an old gas-light system when the sun goes down. Stover jokes that when he wants running water, he runs down to the nearby spring with a bucket in his hand.

"This is home," he said. "There's a fair amount of effort just living [here], but I wouldn't have it any other way."

The 110-acre former farm property came into his family in the hungry days at the beginning of the Great Depression, when his grandmother agreed to work the fields and do housekeeping for the farmer. He lived there until he couldn't anymore and then left it to her. No money exchanged hands, Stover said. His parents, both from Belfast, raised their two sons in northern Massachusetts, but they came back to Maine often throughout the year.