



For Release: June 29, 2017

Contacts:

Nick Ohde | Research & Media Coordinator | Practical Farmers of Iowa | (515) 232-5661 | nick@practicalfarmers.org

Alisha Bower | Midwest Cover Crop Associate | Practical Farmers of Iowa | (515) 232-5661 | alisha@practicalfarmers.org

Small grains directory connects farmers to buyers

AMES, Iowa — Small grains planted in Iowa are now a rolling carpet of green that will be ready to harvest in a few short weeks. These crops – barley, cereal rye, oats, triticale and wheat – are increasingly popular with farmers because they are cheap to raise and can be used in a number of different ways. Small grains can be harvested and used as food-grade grain for people, as feed-grade grain for animals, or as seed for planting cover crops or small grains next year. They can also be baled for straw or grazed as livestock feed.

Despite this range of practical uses, marketing small grains crops can be challenging. To help address this issue, Practical Farmers of Iowa created a directory of businesses that buy small grains in Iowa and neighboring counties of other states. The annual directory, first published last year, is updated yearly. The 2017 edition is now available online at practicalfarmers.org/small-grains, under the “PFI Resources” tab.

The directory lists location and contact information for seed buyers, grain buyers and seed cleaners, as well as the small grains species they buy. Many of the buyers work exclusively with oats or wheat, for example, but others buy four or five different small grains.

Seed and grain buyers take the raw grain and handle cleaning, processing and marketing of the seed and have precise market specifications for the product they buy. For food-grade small grains, minimum test weight and protein levels are required to achieve premium price. Specifications vary from buyer to buyer – so contacting them directly is the best way to make sure you’re matching up the quality of the grain with the buyer.

Seed buyers are interested in different market specifications, namely germination rates and that the seed is clean of diseases. Many acres are contracted for seed production before the season begins, but with increased demand for cover crops, more seed buyers are looking for additional small grains seed beyond their contracted acres.

Seed cleaners are necessary if a farmer wants to sell the seed directly to other farmers, or to use it in his or her own operation. Many farmers, however, no longer own seed cleaning equipment. The seed cleaners listed in the directory do own that machinery and offer seed cleaning as a service to other farmers.

If you own a business that buys small grains and want to be added to the directory, send your information to Alisha Bower (alisha@practicalfarmers.org). For more information about small grains production and markets visit practicalfarmers.org/small-grains.

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Practical Farmers of Iowa strengthens farms and communities through farmer-led investigation and information-sharing. Our values include: welcoming everyone; creativity, collaboration and community; viable farms now and for future generations; and stewardship and ecology. Founded in 1985, farmers in our network raise corn, soybeans, livestock, hay, fruits and vegetables, and more. To learn more, visit <http://practicalfarmers.org>.