

# Northeast Buckwheat Growers Newsletter

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## 2012 Buckwheat Field Day

The 2012 Northeast Buckwheat Field Day will be at the Oechsner Farm, in Newfield, NY on August 22 from 1:00 to 3:30.

Thor Oechsner farms about 600 acres of grain in southern Tompkins County, but a greater variety of grains than most. He is a popular speaker at conferences and field days.

The field day will focus on getting to know the crop better, for both beginning and experienced growers.

Oeschner will show his swathing equipment, which he finds to be key to getting the harvest timing and quality he likes. Buckwheat ripens differently in the various microclimates of the Northeast, so some growers find swathing beneficial, even essential, while others find direct cutting satisfactory.

Other topics will include,

- the standard place of buckwheat in the rotation, how it fits logistically and the benefit it provides to the other crops.
- double cropping after small grains. While it is difficult to predict when the opportunity will arise, it can be worthwhile being prepared to act when it does.
- As always, there will be time to compare notes with other buckwheat growers.

This is the first time the buckwheat field day has been held in Tompkins Co. See page 3 for the significance of this location.

The Oeschner farm is at 1045 Trumbulls Corners Rd., Newfield, just west of downtown off Rt. 13. Watch for signs to the meeting site.

## Production—How people needing gluten-free food depend on you

The incidence of celiac disease had increased in recent years, and those who suffer from it must avoid all gluten. Gluten is a major protein in small grains, so it is hard to avoid. Celiac is a condition where the body responds to gluten by killing off cells in the gut, with life-threatening consequences.

Buckwheat has no gluten, so celiacs value the pure grain as one of the few hearty grain-like foods they can eat.

Other people experience gluten intolerance, and another group that chooses to avoid gluten. There is even a group dedicated to avoiding corn. All of these are exacting buyers of buckwheat products.

Unfortunately, some buckwheat products have recently been found to have trace amounts of gluten, enough to be a problem for some of these consumers.

*Continued on page 3*

## Production notes—Seeding depth

Buckwheat seeds are not as robust as those of other corn, soybeans or wheat, so planting requires closer attention to preparing the seedbed and adjusting the planter to get the right seed placement.

### ***Place the seed just deep enough.***

A good buckwheat stand depends on strong early seedling emergence. Strong early emergence requires two conditions.

1. Shallow seed placement so the seedling does not have to grow through much soil to emerge.
2. The seed is in good contact with moist soil so that it can absorb water and germinate.

These two requirements are often at odds with each other because shallow soil dries out, and because it is hard to close a shallow seed furrow.

Buckwheat is commonly sown on ground that is a bit clumpy from being fallow or other history. That is an excellent place in the rotation for buckwheat, and it will grow vigorously. However, getting the furrow closed is more challenging with those clumps. Trash cleaners and similar attachments can help in that situation, and are preferable to more tillage passes.

Plant as shallow as the soil allows, but no shallower. In the best conditions, the target depth can be as little as  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch, but rougher conditions may take  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch.

### ***All seeds at the same depth.***

Once the target depth is established, all the seeds should end up close to it.

A uniform planting depth has important consequences. In an ideal stand plants bear most of their seed on the main stem and one or two major side branches. Uniform seeding depth is a good start to making most plants fit that description.

If seeds are at varying depth, the shallow seeds will be the first to come up, and they will grow well. The deeper seed will come up later and have slower initial growth.

Smothering the competition is a trait that buckwheat growers value for weed control. However, that property will work on the late-emerging buckwheat plants as well. When the seeding depth varies, there will be more oversized plants, which have to put weight in stems at the expense of seeds, and more small plants that are functionally weeds.

A grain drill is superior to broadcasting in part because the depth uniformity is better. Even a drill has trouble if the openers are out of alignment, or if the soil is lumpy.

### ***Preparing the seedbed.***

A well-prepared seedbed makes ideal seed placement easier. The challenge is to get that seedbed with the gentlest tillage.

Too much tillage is expensive, which is problematic with a relatively low-margin crop. It is also detrimental to soil health. Do as much as you need, but no more. Try to separate the soil aggregates, but keep them intact.

The resulting seedbed should be firm enough to conduct water well to the seed by capillary action but not so dense that it prevents water from percolating down to the seed quickly.

The firmness of the soil below the seed depends on how aggregated and how moist the soil is, and on how it interacts with the shoe of the planter, or with the disk, if that is used in final preparation.

Preparing a seedbed with the least amount of tillage is an operation that really highlights a farmer's knowledge of their farm's soil, how it changes condition with moisture, and how it responds to different implements. A farmer's experience, observation and talent are the most valuable guides to choosing the exact practice to use.

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The Cornell fact sheet on buckwheat planting can be found online at [nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/publications/factsheets/factsheet50.pdf](http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/publications/factsheets/factsheet50.pdf).

## Agriculture Census needs your buckwheat

### 2012 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

YOUR VOICE. YOUR FUTURE. YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

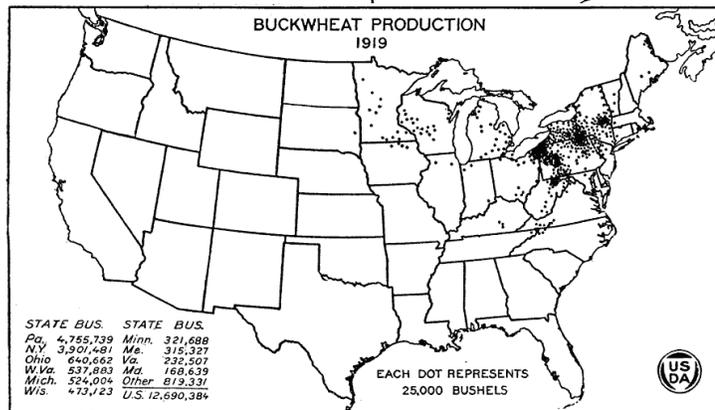
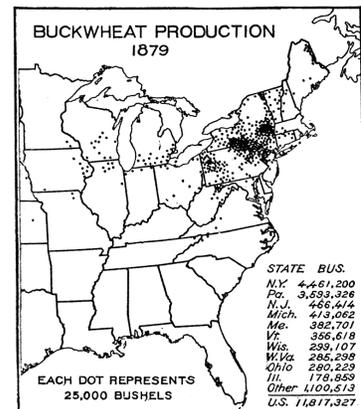
Good estimates of buckwheat production are hard to come by, a difficulty that reduces the ability to provide research, extension and marketing support for the industry. The only regular accounting of US farmers raising buckwheat is the [Census of Agriculture](#), which is performed every five years. The results really are used to determine how production is changing, and what needs to prioritize.

Recent Agricultural Censuses have under-reported Northeast production, based on comparison with proprietary information on sales. Accurate census reports and good grower participation will help fix that discrepancy. With a small-acreage crop like buckwheat, every farmer counts.

When you receive your census form next January, please fill out the information on your buckwheat crop accurately. The results for each farm are kept confidential; county breakdowns are shown only when there are enough growers that you can't guess someone's production. Both Pennsylvania and New York will show state breakdowns for buckwheat.

The two maps below show buckwheat production back in the glory days for the crop. You can see production leaving Eastern New York and increasing in Western Pennsylvania in the forty years between the maps. There was not yet production in North Dakota or in Washington where the Wild West was still in full swing.

Tompkins County, NY is notably at the core of one production area in both maps. Thus the annual Field Day will be in a place with much history. One of the producers then, Rothermich's Buckhorn Farm, is still raising buckwheat.



## Keep buckwheat gluten-free (continued from page 1)

Keeping buckwheat free of grains and bits of corn takes effort at every step. While cleaning at the mill can sort out most stray materials, broken kernels are very difficult to eliminate.

As a buckwheat grower, you can help maintain the gluten-free status of this crop by cleaning out combines, bins and truck beds well

enough to get the broken grains that are the same size as buckwheat. That can be time-consuming, but the value is quality buckwheat.

It is often easier to remember to clean out the equipment soon after small-grains are in than to wait until the buckwheat is ready to harvest.

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## **International Symposium on Buckwheat**

The 12th International Symposium on Buckwheat will be held in August 2013 in Laško, Slovenia.

The conference website is at [12isbslovenia.weebly.com](http://12isbslovenia.weebly.com)

and the organizers can be contacted at [12isbSlovenia@gmail.com](mailto:12isbSlovenia@gmail.com)

Laško is a resort town in central Slovenia known for its thermal spa and its large brewery.

Professor Ivan Kreft and his colleagues at the University of Ljubljana have a long record of research into many aspects of buckwheat production, biology and utilization.

### ***About the Northeast Buckwheat Growers Association***

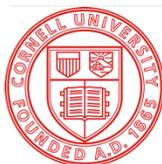
The NBGA is made up of about 150 buckwheat growers in the Northeast.

Membership may be obtained by contacting the editor and providing contact information (address, phone, email). There is currently no charge to join.

This semi-annual newsletter goes out to those who have signed up as members of NBGA. The printed version is sent to

members in the Northeast, and electronic version elsewhere. The complete member list is distributed to members each fall.

The Northeast Buckwheat Growers Association has been on the World Wide Web since 1998. An on-line Buckwheat Production Guide for the Northeast and back issues of this newsletter are available there.



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