

INTRODUCTION

Local grain sourcing in Vermont has been a huge barrier to bringing locally sourced baked goods and breads to the University of Vermont. Although there are many bakeries within a couple miles of the University, under the Real Food Challenge guidelines, 50% of the ingredients have to be grown locally (within 250 miles) in order for the products to count as “real”. The University of Vermont has pledged to have 20% of total food purchasing be qualified as fair trade, organic, local, or humane by 2020. Because of the high volume of bread purchased, finding a bread source that could also contribute to the Real Food percentage could potentially have a large impact. The University is also such a major purchaser that supporting local grain production could have a very beneficial influence in the local grain economy in the state.

This report focuses on three different potential vendors: Gleason’s Grains, Green Mountain Flour, and King Arthur Flour. Gleason’s Grains grows certified organic grains and mills mainly whole wheat flour on 115 acres in Bridport, VT. Green Mountain Flour produces certified organic grain grown by Vermont, New York, and Maine farmers that is then stone milled in Windsor, VT. King Arthur Flour is based in Norwich, VT and sells conventional and organic flour grown by farmers all across the country.

METHODS

Data collection for this feasibility study was mainly done using two methods. The first was internet background research and the second was contacting the companies

directly. Communications with King Arthur Flour were done via email, while Green Mountain Flour and Gleason's Grains were contacted by phone.

Each company was examined based on their environmental, social, and community development practices in addition to their capacity to meet the demands of the University of Vermont. These factors fed into their overall feasibility which was ranked on a scale from 1-5, with 1 meaning the company was fully feasible with no changes needed and 5 meaning the company is not feasible partner and is not worth pursuing.

RESULTS

King Arthur Flour

Volume

Volume is no problem for King Arthur Flour, as the grain used for their flour is grown in states where it grows well, unlike Vermont. They would be able to meet UVM's flour demand.

Distribution Size

King Arthur Flour is able to sell in bulk.

Distributors

King Arthur uses UVM certified distributors, such as Sysco, UNFI, and US Foods so they could potentially start selling to UVM right away.

Real Food Challenge Guidelines

Though King Arthur is a local company, they do not source their grain from within 250 road miles of Burlington. The red winter wheat varieties are grown in the Midwest belt region, while the spring wheat varieties are grown in the Dakotas. Because

of this, King Arthur would not meet the local standards of the real food challenge. However, King Arthur does offer a line of organic flour, that would count under the organic category.

Price Competitiveness

King Arthur, because of their sizable operation, would be able to offer their product at a competitive price, but would still be significantly more than the current supplier, particularly for the Organic line.

Sustainability (community, planet, people and health)

King Arthur Flour was the first B-Corp in Vermont, and set many social standards for their company. According to their website, King Arthur has taken steps to reduce their impact on the environment by recycling, composting, and reducing carbon emissions. The company provides employees a stake in their Employee Stock Ownership Plan, where they benefit, or lose, based on the company's success or failure. King Arthur also plays a key role in the community by contributing to causes through donations and volunteering. There were not many specifics available on the website, so we have rated King Arthurs sustainability at a 2, meaning they are a sustainable company but could do a little better in communicating their practices to consumers.

Overall Impressions

Although King Arthur Flour does not meet RFC requirements for local, it would still be a great company for UVM to partner with due to its local roots and sustainable practices.

Feasibility Rating and Explanation

Since King Arthur is a local company and sell UVM's preferred type of flour, we have rated them as a 1 for feasibility. Though the grain is not grown locally, they are able to deliver the white flour requested by Sodexo in the quantity needed. If Sodexo purchased their Organic line of flour, they would also be able to boost their Real Food percentage.

Green Mountain Flour

Volume

Green Mountain Flour would be able to meet UVM's flour demand. However, they do not produce the type of flour used by Sodexo and they only sell stone-milled flour, mostly whole wheat.

Distribution Size

Green Mountain is able to sell in bulk.

Distributors

Green Mountain flour uses UVM certified distributors, such as Black River Produce.

Real Food Challenge Guidelines

Even though Green Mountain Flour is located in Vermont, not all of the grain processed by them is grown in Vermont due to a lack of availability. However, they are committed to buying as locally as possible, which typically means buying from producers in New York and Maine. This means that a portion of their product usually is sourced from within 250 road miles, but not all of it. Because of this, they would not reliably be able to count as "local" under the Real Food Challenge guidelines. They also give

preference to organic growers, but because this is not consistent and they do not have a certification, they would not qualify for the organic category either.

Price Competitiveness

Since Green Mountain is a small producer that sources directly from farmers, it would be hard for them to stay price competitive for Sodexo. Daniella Malin cited 10 to 13 cents per pound as a standard bulk price for conventional flour, possibly reaching as high as 30. However, their company typically aims for about 60 cents per pound and is not currently able deviate much from that.

Sustainability (community, planet, people and health)

Green Mountain Flour does not have any sustainability guidelines in place, but overall they are a sustainable business. Their website states -"We believe that organic growing practices promote biodiversity, a healthy ecosystem, and a high organic carbon levels in the soil – important for both mitigation and adaptation to climate change." We have rated them as a 3, meaning they do use sustainable practices but do not set sustainability guidelines for their business, so there is no structured accountability.

Overall Impressions

Green Mountain Flour is a great local business that would do well in partnership with UVM. Even though they are small, they would still be able to meet all the demands of UVM and could offer dining services a different type of flour that is more nutritious. They are also a new business and are excited at the possibility of partnership with a large purchaser like UVM.

Feasibility Rating and Explanation

We have rated Green Mountain Flour's feasibility as a 2. Since they are able to meet the demand and sell in bulk, there is a serious opportunity for partnership with UVM. However, dining services would have to adapt to using stone-milled flour rather than the white flour they currently use.

Gleason's Grains

Volume

Due to crop failures, the volume is a bit inconsistent. However, on an average year, Ben Gleason produces enough flour to cover the needs of UVM. However, he does not make white all-purpose flour.

Distribution Size

Gleason's is able to distribute in bulk.

Distributors

Gleason's has used Black River produce in the past, though Mr. Gleason finds this distributor to be a hassle. He says he never knows what time they are coming and this has been disruptive to his work in the past. Using this distributor is also a barrier to remaining price competitive.

Real Food Challenge Guidelines

Because Gleason's is both local and organic, they would qualify as Real Food A.

Price competitiveness

At approximately 35 dollars a bag, Gleason's Grains are at least three times more expensive than the conventional flour already being purchased by the university.

Sustainability (Community, planet, people and health)

Gleason's Grains is entirely run by Ben Gleason, so issues like employee benefits do not apply. He responsibly manages his fields with crop rotation and certified organic practices. He also handles waste by selling the excess bran to a dairy farm for feed. Mr. Gleason also feels that providing a high quality, healthful product is a positive service for the community. He also makes a point to provide farm tours so that the community can learn from his work and become intimately familiar with the product. Gleason's has extremely good practices, so we have rated them a 1 for sustainability.

Overall Impressions

Gleason's Grains is a great company with very sustainable practices. The company seems to be operating at a steady size, with no real desire to expand given their current resources. Crop failures are the biggest challenge for this company.

Feasibility Rating and Explanation

Gleason's Grain has been given the feasibility rating of 5 as they would not be able to, and is not interested in, partnering with UVM dining services. Ben Gleason made it clear that if UVM really wanted to make the switch to local flour, they would have to give up their dependence on white flour. Gleason's is not able to meet the demand of UVM's flour needs since Mr. Gleason already has steady markets for his whole wheat flour and his operation is not likely to expand much in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the greatest barriers for UVM in purchasing local grain is the type of local flour available. Like Ben Gleason told us, it would be nearly impossible for UVM to find a local grain grower that could offer the amount of white flour they have asked for.

Price is also a big barrier for purchasing local grain. Since Gleason's Grains and Green Mountain Flour are both very small companies, it would be hard to offer them a price that falls into UVM's budget and still allows the companies to make a profit.

The Real Food Challenge definition of "local" is another limiting factor. Since farmers are struggling to grow grain Vermont, it is not likely that UVM will be able to source all their flour locally anytime soon unless dining services is willing to pay a bit more for it and work with whole wheat flours. Overall, it may be more beneficial to focus on organics when it comes to grain.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

If Sodexo was able to transition to different types of flour, there would be much more opportunity to support local producers, such as Green Mountain. Green Mountain flour is the most willing to expand and partner with Sodexo, which could be really good for their business. However, they only offer whole wheat flour so Sodexo would need to make room for that product in their recipes. If Sodexo is unwilling to make this type of change, King Arthur Organic line allows the type of flour that Sodexo requested, which would count as a Real Food B product that also supports the local economy.

SOURCES

Ben Gleason, <http://www.gleasongrains.com/>

Daniella Malin, www.greenmountainflour.com

Shawna Goldfarb, www.kingarthurflour.com