

NOTES FROM A MAKER

FLOUR POWER

BY JENNIFER KORNEGAY

“It just tastes so much better,” says Peggy Sutton, founder of Alabama’s To Your Health (TYH) Sprouted Flour Co, as she explains the differences between her flours and conventional ones. Others obviously agree. In just a decade, her company has grown from a hobby that began in her kitchen into a business that will see revenues of six million dollars this year. And it’s only getting bigger. A new facility (operational this past July) let TYH bump up its weekly production from 50,000 to 120,000 pounds of sprouted flours and sprouted products

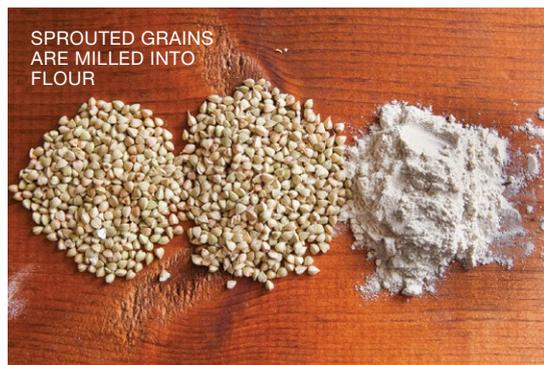
ies touting the health benefits of sprouted grain flours and was intrigued. “I thought I’d try it,” she says.

Armed with a mason jar and a few handfuls of tiny golden grains, she sprouted her first batch of wheat in her kitchen, dried it, hand-ground it into flour, and used it to bake a loaf of bread. She cut herself a warm slice, and it was love at first bite. “It was so good. I was hooked,” she says. She shared the love by baking more bread, cookies, and crackers and giving them to friends. After a few months of giving her treats away, she saw enough demand to start a business.

In 2006, To Your Health Sprouted Flour was officially born.

It takes four days to make the flour and begins with non-GMO, kosher, organic whole grains and legumes like red and white wheat, spelt, kamut, rye, black beans, corn, brown rice, and amaranth. They are first soaked in water, then drained and allowed to rest while nature takes its course. Within twenty-four hours, tiny shoots push their way out to sprout. A proprietary drying

process halts the growth before the grains are stone-ground into fluffy, powdery flour and shipped to customers around the world.

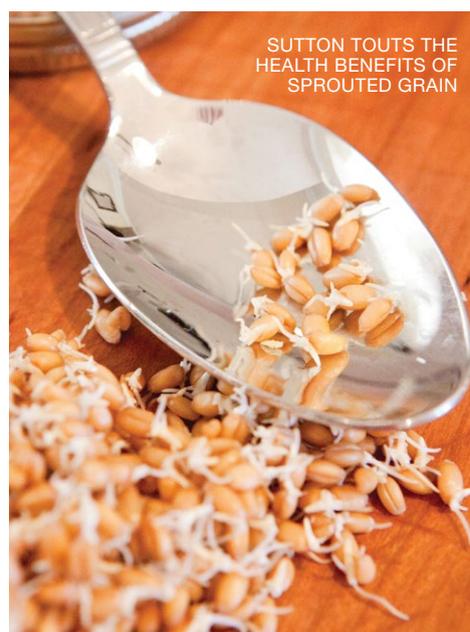


SPROUTED GRAINS ARE MILLED INTO FLOUR

made from twenty-eight types of organic grains and legumes. It can now make enough to keep up with steadily rising demand, including the quantities that national brand Kashi buys for use in several of its products.

But production still takes place in Sutton’s rural hometown, Fitzpatrick, Alabama, where it all began. Sutton has always been an avid baker and proactive about her health. In 2004, she began researching ways to make her two interests intersect. “I started paying more attention to how what we eat affects our bodies,” she says, “and it got me thinking about my grandparents and great-grandparents.” They lived healthy, long lives, and Sutton believes the way they ate played a role. When she compared their diets to her own, a major difference jumped out. Flour.

Decades ago, after grain was harvested, much of it sat waiting to be sold. During this period, the grains did what they were intended to do—sprout. They were then dried and ground into flour. But after the industrialization of agriculture, things moved at a quicker pace, leaving no time for sprouting. Sutton found several stud-



SUTTON TOUTS THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF SPROUTED GRAIN



The flour’s health benefits are a direct result of sprouting, which “wakes up” several key vitamins, minerals, and enzymes. Some studies say that vitamin C and carotene contents are increased up to 800 percent and that B vitamins are actually created during sprouting. According to Sutton, sprouting also breaks down the grains’ natural protective barrier, making them easier to digest. And starting with organic grains helps. “Conventional flours are heavily processed. In our flours, nothing is taken away and nothing is added in,” she says.

In the end though, it all comes back to flavor. “The sprouting process allows some of the starch in each grain to transform into simple sugars,” Sutton says. These sugars act like a spotlight, highlighting the individual characteristics of each grain. “Kamut is buttery. Spelt is kinda nutty,” she says. “They’re different but all tastier than conventional flours.”

She’s gaining loyal fans, and TYH has blossomed into an industry leader. Sutton is working with the Whole Grains Council to establish national industry standards for sprouted grains, which will be submitted to the Food and Drug Administration. Meanwhile, TYH continues to push forward. “There’s a lot of room left in the sprouted market,” Sutton says. “We hope to be the first to make sprouted almond flour.”

The sprouted grain industry is new, but at the same time, it’s not. “It’s really getting back to basics, a time-honored tradition done in a modern way,” Sutton says. As her company celebrates its tenth anniversary, she’s as passionate about the process as ever. “I still sprout at home, in my mason jars, and it still fascinates me.”

PHOTOS BY ERIKA TRACY