

An excerpt from the *Healthy Eating, Smart Learning! Grains Issue*

Teff is a type of grass, which is an ancient grain. It originated in Ethiopia between 4000 and 1000 BC and has been a staple grain in African and Asian diets. Increasingly, it is being used as an alternative to wheat and other grains in the U.S.; it is grown in at least 25 states including Nevada, because of its high nutritional content and the fact that it contains no gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley, making it appealing to those with celiac disease.

According to the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE), teff is a high-quality horse hay. The word teff means “lost,” because the teff seed is the smallest grain in the world – if you dropped one on the ground, it would be lost.

It may be tiny, but it’s powerful. One cup of teff contains a whopping 62% of the recommended daily value of dietary fiber, 82% of iron, 89% of magnesium, and 83% of phosphorus. It’s high in protein and contains all eight essential amino acids.

When it’s grown as a grain, teff is usually made into flour, which has traditionally been used to produce an Ethiopian bread called injera, or a type of cereal resembling porridge or Cream of Wheat. Its flour can be used in much the same way as other flours. Nevada teff, primarily growing in Churchill County, is becoming very important to the state’s economy. It was first grown as an experiment in 2007 by the UNCE as a way to demonstrate how to produce feed for cattle in drought years, when the state saw very little water. The seeds are very inexpensive to grow and produce a lot of grain quickly. Because of this, production of teff has grown, and about half of the teff sold as grain or flour in the U.S. is now grown in Nevada, providing \$1 million to the state’s economy each year.

Desert Oasis fills a void with teff
By Steve Ranson, LVN Editor Emeritus

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Churchill County keeps solidifying its place as the agricultural center of Nevada. A seed cleaning operation that took several years to become operational has put Desert Oasis Teff & Grain on the map for the small grain.

"We have the farmers growing teff," said Fallon's Jay Davison, a retired alternative crops and forage specialist at University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

Davison said teff is one of the smallest grain seeds in the world that requires one-half to two-thirds the water other grains need. Sixteen years ago, Davison contacted three dozen farmers from around the area to listen to a teff producer who wanted farmers to grow about 500 acres of the grain. Since that presentation, more and more farmers began to grow teff, and now Nevada and Idaho are among the top producers of the grain.

Handout: Teff – Nevada’s Newest Grain

Nevada Agriculture and Water Series



"About six to seven ranches are growing it," Davison said at an open house for Desert Oasis Teff & Grain.

Fallon farmers and longtime friends John Getto and Dave Eckert began growing teff as an experiment a decade ago, but then they decided to build a seed cleaning operation and grow more types of gluten-free grains.

"We got the plant running a year ago, but it took two years to build it," Getto said. "We grow our own teff, and if we need more, we have other farmers."

Now, Desert Oasis' cleaning and storage facility on Golden Circle is filling a niche for the grain by sending grain in bulk to processing plants, and also providing smaller quantities for the Fallon operation. "This is bringing dollars to the community," Davison said, adding when the businesses increase so does the workforce.

Teff is a three-month, rotational crop, and Davidson said many people are finding different uses for the grain. He said some people give their horses teff feed and hay.



Caption: Myles Getto of Fallon, Nevada walks through one of his teff fields.

Near Fallon, young farmer Myles Getto spends his time growing grain. As a freshman in a high school agricultural education class, he was encouraged to develop a work-based learning project through which he could apply and expand upon the knowledge and skills he was gaining in the classroom. In 2016, Myles grew 40 acres of teff (a small grain that thrives even in difficult climates) and 40 acres of white milo for dairy cattle feed.

When asked what he does as a young farmer growing teff, he discusses planting teff because of its drought tolerant traits, problem solving for insects and weather conditions, calculating and applying appropriate levels of fertilizers and pesticides and implementing efficient water practices. He also tracks field data to determine if various planting methods impact plant health and growth, budgets and pays suppliers and operates harvesting equipment.