



# NZ-grown wheat can replace overseas imports



In terms of crop quality, NZ milling wheat is equal to imported Australian supplies.

When you pick up a loaf of bread, especially in the North Island, there's a nearly 100-per-cent chance the wheat used for flour has been grown across the Tasman, or even further afield.

Domestic wheat production was estimated to be around 113,000 tonne last year, making up around a quarter of the total market. Australia supplied most of the balance.

An arable industry milling wheat initiative, involving the encouragement of local bakers and food companies to use more "NZ grown grains" aims to change that.

New Zealand has the right cultivars, available land and a warm, dry climate to grow wheat for bread, buns, biscuits, pasta and other food products.

Growers across Mid and South Canterbury currently supply most of the South Island market and have the capacity to keep North Island flour mills and bakeries supplied with wheat.

That said, one of the ongoing challenges in growing more local wheat for NZ relates to navigating South Island to North Island freight costs and transport logistics.

When it comes to shipping costs, the Cook Strait crossing is one of the most expensive pieces of water to traverse.

Add to that are challenges around efficiently consolidating and moving regular and sizeable tonnages to key customers up North.

Ramping up production is possible, but it is dictated by land availability, normal farm rotations and simple supply and demand equations.

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Much of this is due to the hard work of plant breeders, who have developed and introduced new and improved cultivars to farmers over the past 40 years.

Newly bred wheat varieties have delivered various desired qualities including higher protein levels, better resistance to pests and diseases, and lower gluten levels.

And of course, higher crop yields and improved grower profits.

New Zealand growers are one of the most productive in the world and in 2017 and 2020 an Ashburton grower held the Guinness World Record for the highest wheat yield – over 16 tonnes per hectare.

Our strategy of becoming our own bread basket still has a long way to go before it replaces international imports.

– By Thomas Chin,  
General Manager, NZ Grain & Seed Trade Assn

## Key points:

- NZ wheat growers, plant breeders and industry good-bodies are working on a New Zealand grown strategy to minimise the reliance on milling wheat imports

- NZ already produces the varieties that the milling and baking industry want
- The NZ wheat industry produced around 113,000 tonnes last year

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