



Wheat Foods
C O U N C I L
wheatfoods.org

wheat from **farm** to **fork**

Agriculture

In America, wheat is grown in 42 states on nearly 64 million acres of land resulting in 2.5 billion bushels of wheat annually. While we rank fourth in worldwide production of wheat, the United States is the largest wheat-exporting nation in the world, providing necessary nourishment to people everywhere.

Wheat Classes

There are six classes of **wheat** grown and harvested in the United States: **Hard Red Winter, Hard Red Spring, Soft Red Winter, Hard White, Soft White and Durum**. Wheat is classified by the hardness of the grain, the color of the kernel and the time of planting. The climate and conditions present in certain regions of the country determine the class of wheat grown in those regions.

The Wheat Plant

Wheat is a member of the grass family. The wheat plant has four stages of growth – tillering, jointing, booting and flowering. Throughout each of these stages, the wheat grower must watch for wheat's most threatening enemies, which are weather, fungi and insects.

After the grower notices the first shoot, or tiller, appear from the ground, additional shoots sprout at the soil level and grow. This is the **tillering** stage. At the beginning of this phase, there is ample distance between each of the tillers. As more shoots sprout, they fill in the empty spaces.

In **jointing**, the shoot grows several more “joints,” also known as nodes and leaves. The nodes help to extend the stem and provide stability. Leaves grow from the nodes and help the plant obtain necessary nutrients from the sun, rain and fertilizer.

In **booting**, the head that is forming inside the stem emerges with the last leaf wrapped around it. The head then continues to grow upward out of the wrapped boot of the leaf, unfolding during the **flowering** phase.

The Harvest

Each type of wheat has different planting and harvesting times throughout the year. For example, Winter Wheat is planted in the fall, lies dormant through the winter, grows in the spring and then is harvested in early summer. Spring Wheat is planted in the spring, sprouts within weeks and is harvested in the fall.

For thousands of years, the harvest involved **reaping** and **threshing** of the entire field by hand. To “reap” means to cut the wheat at its base with a large blade and manually bundle it. Threshing required either cattle or farmers to beat the kernels out of the grain head.

Today, the majority of producers use the **combine** to cut and separate the grain and store it in a bin on the machine. When the bin is full, it is deposited into a truck that drives the load to the grain elevator for storage.

