

Business Development Success Nomination:

SEDCOR helps Yamasa Corporation to increase Oregon-grown content for its soy sauces, creating supply chain resiliency.



RUDDENKLAU FARMS + YAMASA SOY SAUCE

Yamasa Corporation, a Japanese company that traces its roots back to 1645, has been a major artisanal sauce manufacturer in the Willamette Valley since 1994, crafting world-famous Asian sauces in their Salem brewery. Through a routine business retention and expansion visit, SEDCOR learned that the Yamasa leadership team made a goal to decrease the company's dependency on Midwest wheat; finding an Oregon source for wheat would fortify their supply chain and significantly reduce their carbon footprint. The SEDCOR team connected Yamasa with Ruddenklau Farms, who grew wheat but not of the hard red variety Yamasa required.

Willing to see if a hard red wheat could be grown with the required protein content in the Mid-Valley climate, the Ruddenklaus agreed to grow a test of 21-acres in the summer of 2020. The SEDCOR team joined Yamasa on a visit to the farm just before harvest to find that the crop was responding well to our local climate. After harvest, the wheat was sent to testing labs to confirm

that the harvest more than met Yamasa's high standards, resulting in a contract for 100 acres of red wheat to be grown by the Ruddenklaus for Yamasa Corp USA.

The SEDCOR team prides itself on nurturing the relationships that allow such introductions and partnerships to flourish in the Mid-Valley. The Ruddenklaus can now add soy sauce to the long list of value-added products made with their crops, and Yamasa Corporation can proudly state their products are made with Oregon wheat.

The Capital Press featured an article on the project that well captures the collaboration between the three partners – SEDCOR as the convener, The Ruddenklau Family as the farmers, and Yamasa Inc. as the manufacturer.

Willamette Valley farm experiments growing wheat for soy sauce.

By GEORGE PLAVEN Capital Press Dec 3, 2020

AMITY, Ore. — Bruce Ruddenklau is no stranger to growing wheat at his Willamette Valley farm, but this experiment was something a little different.

Ruddenklau and his wife, Helle, farm nearly 1,000 acres near Amity, Ore., producing a variety of specialty crops including grass seed, radish seed and beans. The couple also plants wheat in rotation, which provides agronomic benefits and a little extra cash on the side.

When Yamasa Inc., one of the world's largest makers of soy sauce, expressed an interest in using flour milled from local wheat at its production plant in nearby Salem, Ruddenklau said they were game to give it a shot.

But there was one key distinction. Most wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest is soft white wheat, a variety with comparatively low levels of protein that is largely exported to Asia, where it is used to make spongecake, noodles and crackers.

The kind of flour required to make soy sauce must be higher in protein — at least 11%. That would mean growing a different variety, known as hard red wheat, with which growers in the region like Ruddenklau have less experience.

“We weren't real sure if we could make it here or not,” Ruddenklau said. “I figured we had nothing to lose by giving this a try.”

Yamasa is a Japanese corporation that traces its roots to 1645. The company opened its U.S. soy sauce plant in southeast Salem in 1994.

“Oregon's moderate climate, humidity and water quality are instrumental in the brewing of soy sauce by environmentally assisting the required fermentation process that produces a mellow, distinct taste,” Yamasa explains on its website.

While ingredients for Yamasa soy sauce have typically come from the Midwest and Canada, CEO Koji Shiraiwa said he wanted to buy locally grown wheat as a way to reduce transportation costs and increase brand recognition.

“We are not planning to take over our competitor, but rather planning to build a strong foothold in the local market by emphasizing our high-quality soy sauce using local ingredients,” Shiraiwa said. “Surprisingly, not many Oregonians know Yamasa is local.”

The company reached out earlier this year to SEDCOR, the Strategic Economic Development Corporation serving Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, for help.

SEDCOR, in turn, contacted Ruddenklau Farms to see if they would be interested growing the high-protein wheat needed at Yamasa.

“We are so blessed to live in one of the most fertile regions on the continent,” said Abisha Stone, Yamhill County business retention and expansion manager for SEDCOR.

“Oregon is known for being a high quality, high value, value-added food production state. I think it’s because our growers are smart, and our food manufacturers are savvy.”

Ruddenklau said they found and purchased hard red wheat seed from northeast Oregon and planted a 20-acre plot that had just rotated out of tall fescue and spring peas.

Thanks in part to timely rains and a late-season application of fertilizer, Ruddenklau said the harvest was a success, yielding an estimated 125 bushels per acre. The wheat was tested for protein levels at Oregon State University, coming in at 15%.

“At the end of the season, we got it,” Ruddenklau said. “That was really encouraging.”

But the story is not yet finished, as Ruddenklau is quick to point out. The wheat is still in the bin while samples undergo further testing for chemical residues. Once that happens, Ruddenklau said he is optimistic it could lead to a niche market for area growers. “We just need to have some more time to figure out if it can be consistent,” he said. Hard red wheat at 13% protein is currently trading in Portland at \$5.70-\$5.80 per bushel, versus \$5.55-\$5.64 per bushel for soft white wheat, providing a small price premium. Stone, with SEDCOR, said the benefits to the region extend beyond the farm. “When community members buy locally made goods, they keep their money in the community,” Stone said. “The same applies to businesses — when they source from local suppliers, that money stays in our local economy and has a multiplier effect, supporting the creation of jobs, local infrastructure through the increased tax base, and ultimately more local goods are made.”