



GRAND TRAVERSE CULINARY OILS/ GRAND TRAVERSE PASTA COMPANY



Bill Koucky was chosen as the 2016 winner of the Food & Farming Network's Chapman Award. The award is "given each year to the person that shows unerring dedication, enduring fortitude, and embodies the exceptional pioneering spirit that is remaking American agriculture right here in Northwest Michigan."



Some might refer to Bill Koucky as a "serial entrepreneur". His first company, Grand Traverse Culinary Oils, was launched after a foray into canola oil began with planting 20 acres for fuel production a decade ago.

The first harvest he was without a truck so he augured the canola from the combine through the sunroof of his VW station wagon. He then made it into oil and ultimately biodiesel and put the biodiesel back into his tractor completing the circle. When it became apparent to him three years ago that the use should be for food, he opened a food grade facility and started Grand Traverse Culinary Oils producing both canola and sunflower oils. In 2015, he grew about 75 acres of canola and 100 acres of sunflowers. The canola and sunflower oils are sold in Meijer and will soon be in Whole Foods statewide. Currently, he is planning on expanding production and launching a new refinery to do light refining that will allow him to enter into a larger bulk food market.

Bill is also producing several stone ground flours - soft white pastry, buckwheat, corn, emmer and hard red spring which is a bread flour. He went against advice of all the experts and planted 20 acres two years ago as an experiment and rotation for the canola. He was told he wouldn't be able to produce the wheat with the characteristics that were required - high protein and a lower moisture content. He wound up producing very high quality grains with a protein above fourteen percent and is now using ten farmers. The flours are now being used in several northwestern Michigan restaurants and bakeries.

He has also started to work as a middleman for the new barley/malting industry, acting as a contract cleaner for several farmers. Maltsters require clean, debarbed barley and most farmers do not have the ability to provide that product. He is also looking to break into the distillery industry more directly as stone ground flour to distill into whiskey is new to the industry. He is presently running tests on his own distillery using the grains for beverage use. He is licensed to produce ethanol as a fuel and is looking to convert the license to beverage in 2016, working with local farmers to increase production of barley, rye, wheat, and corn for the distillery industry.

Last month, he started Grand Traverse Pasta Company making pasta using his own stone ground flour. The pasta is currently available at the Traverse City Farm Market, and Bill is planning on selling through his regular distribution next month.

"I'm very grateful for the assistance the Product Center gave me for all of my nutritional labeling for the pasta, oil and flour products," states Bill Koucky. "They were also very instrumental in getting us into Meijer with the sunflower and canola oil."



Bill Koucky