

Kansas millstone earns Panera Bread contract

NEW CAMBRIA (AP) — Farmer Direct Foods Homestead Mill has landed a contract to supply Panera Bread with flour for its whole grain breads.

Panera, which has 900 bakery-cafes across the country, buys a "significant amount" of its whole-grain flour from Farmer Direct, said spokeswoman Julie Sommers.

Homestead Mill, one of a handful of authentic stoneground mills in the country, has three giant red-granite millstones that can each grind about 1,200 pounds of whole-wheat flour every hour during a typical 10- to 18-hour day.

The flour is dumped into 40-pound bags, which are automatically weighed and sealed before moving down a conveyor belt to be compacted and loaded onto shipping pallets.

"When we really get rolling, we can load a semi in an afternoon," said Kent Symns, president of Farmer Direct Foods, an Atchison-based closed cooperative of white-wheat growers that owns the mill at New Cambria, a town about seven miles east of Salina.

"This kind of milling is something of an art," Symns said. "It takes a lot of monitoring and setting and re-setting."

Farmer Direct flour is an ingredient in Panera's whole-grain, country, rye, three-seed and honey-wheat breads.

"We've been really happy with

our relationship with Farmer Direct," Sommers said. "One of the great things about the organization is the passion for providing a quality product."

Recent studies touting the health advantages of food made with whole grains has helped demand for white wheat flour, which produces a soft, sweet whole-grain bread.

"One of the things a lot of people don't like about whole-wheat bread made with hard red wheat is the coarse texture and bitter taste that come from the red bran," Symns said. "White wheat does not have the tannins that give red wheat that color."

But higher demand also has a downside.

Over the past decade, that has been sufficient production — an effort that is expected to be further hampered as farmers face higher expenses to grow white wheat without higher prices when they sell it.

For the first three years of a major U.S. Department of Agriculture push for white wheat, a government program offered an incentive bonus to white-wheat growers and a per-acre subsidy to help pay for the higher cost of certified white wheat seed.

Those payments went away last year. And acres of white wheat overall have gone down.

"The flour business is quite competitive," Symns said.

In stitches



Cayla Carter, on floor, and Brittany Silsbee, center, watched Carrie Bredemeier explain how to crochet during a crochet class last week at Colby United Methodist Church. The class is one of many in the Summer Youth Program at the church.

Nex-Tech awards Oakley student

LENORA — Crayons, paper and inspiration — these are the tools of the trade when you're a third grader putting together a masterpiece to submit to Nex-Tech Directory's "Art From the Heart" program.

Marlee Roth of Oakley has one of those masterpieces.

For the sixth year in a row, Nex-Tech Directory Services has commissioned children in the region to submit colored drawings for use in the yellow pages section of the Nex-Tech Directory. Many of the brightly colored entries are selected at random and displayed interspersed among the yellow page advertising.

In addition, Nex-Tech Directory Services has a random drawing among the entries submitted, to determine cash prize winners. This year, Kyle Pfeifer of Hill City, and Marlee Rath of Oakley, submitted the lucky pictures.

Their teachers are Anita Kerbaugh of Hill City Elementary School and Carla Pilkington of Oakley Elementary, respectively. Each of these four will receive \$50 cash.

A sampling of these talents will be in the November 2006 Nex-Tech Directory.

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