

Ferrel Farm and Blue Mountain Seed

The Ferrel family started farming in the Walla Walla Valley in 1864. Today, Greg and Gary Ferrel are the 5th generation to be involved in the family farm. Greg Ferrel farms the land, growing dry land wheat in rotation with garbanzo beans. Gary Ferrel manages a garbanzo bean and dried pea processing plant started in 1991 called Blue Mountain Seed.

They didn't always grow garbanzo beans. In fact, when the family started growing garbanzo beans, they were one of a handful of farmers to experiment with the crop 25 years ago.



Greg Ferrel standing in his field of garbanzo beans.
Photo: Joe Tierney — Courtesy WW Union-Bulletin

They plant the seeds in late April or early May and harvest chickpeas in early to late August. If the plants and beans don't suffer damage from storms, the Palouse climate and soils provide high yields. Washington State is the largest producer of chickpeas in the nation.



Chickpeas do best with about 16 to 18 inches of rainfall a year. But they also have a strong taproot that can extract water up to 6 feet down in the soil. Chickpeas have less bug problems than dry peas. Ferrel said he has only sprayed three times for bugs in 25 years with the chickpeas.



Gary Ferrel standing at the Blue Mountain Seed facility

The Ferrel family grew peas for many years and diversified into garbanzos in the 1980's. The Blue Mountain Seed Company started in 1991 which processes and exports dried peas and garbanzos grown on the Ferrel Farm as well as others within a 30 mile radius –from Milton Freewater to Dayton.

Blue Mountain Seed Company exports beans to many regions of the world, California purchasing the most within the US. Internationally, Spain is their number one buyer, followed by Australia and India.

The garbanzo beans used to make the hummus for March 2013 Harvest of the Month came from Blue Mountain Seed Company.