



# Slow Food<sup>®</sup>

## CANADIAN

### HERITAGE WHEAT PRESIDIUM

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Red Fife wheat originally came to Canada in 1842 and was first grown in the Otonabee region of what is now central Ontario, in Canada. David Fife was a struggling farmer in the region who first planted Red Fife using seed samples received from Scotland. Like any good story, the origins of Red Fife are lost in legend and local myth but historians and agronomists suggest that the wheat came to Canada as an impure sample from a Ukrainian ship docked in Scotland. Red Fife's striking similarities to Halychanka wheat indicate that it is a descendant of this Ukrainian wheat. Others believe that, what we call Red Fife, is an accidental hybrid from seed already present in the Canadian soil and Halychanka wheat.

Regardless of the exact origin, the few stalks of what came to be called Red Fife wheat flourished as no other wheat had to date. Hardy and resistant to the diseases of the time, Red Fife also boasted exceptional flavour and baking properties that made it much in demand with farmers, millers and bakers. Its name derives from the farmer who introduced it and the deep colour it achieves when fully ripe.

The popularity of Red Fife continued to expand as increasing numbers of immigrants began to move across the Canadian Prairies in the early 1880's. The flat plains of rich soil were ideal for wheat production and Red Fife provided farmers with a consistent, high quality crop in our harsh prairie climate. Within 70 years of Red Fife wheat's introduction, Canada's reputation as an exporter of high quality, hard spring wheats was internationally established.

Red Fife soon became the celebrated parent wheat to a new generation of wheats which further established Canada's wheat industry. According to Canadian government agronomists, the unique properties of Red Fife and its adaptation to the Canadian climate has made it the genetic parent to virtually all Canadian wheats grown on the Prairies today. Essentially, Red Fife wheat is the foundation of the entire Canadian wheat industry.

Sadly, the modern Canadian standards for grading wheat do not acknowledge flavour or cultural heritage in legalizing wheat for sale. The Canadian wheat system today has no place for the seed that is the basis of its existence. Instead, Red Fife has survived due to the work of only a handful of organic heritage wheat and seed farmers scattered across Canada who have been faithfully growing out the wheat to keep it from extinction. There is only a very small quantity of this wheat in existence.

The Canadian Slow Food Ark has adopted organic Red Fife wheat as its first Presidium. Our vision is to develop a renaissance of Red Fife wheat for use in artisan bread production. Artisan bread baking is a craft marked by smaller batches, hand formed loaves, and baking on stone hearths. The slow wild yeast fermentation process of artisan baking brings out the great depth of flavour in heritage wheats for a richer and fuller wheat taste.

By emphasizing organically cultivated wheat, we celebrate the cultural heritage of our early wheat farmers who farmed with integrity and respect for the land that fed them. The organic standard also helps to guarantee that heritage wheats are kept free from the taint of genetically modified organisms.



Organic & Handcrafted

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Courtesy of Slow Food Canada  
[slowfood.ca](http://slowfood.ca)

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Baking Wednesday Through Sunday