



Press Release – For Release Prior to or on EARTH DAY

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CELEBRATING EARTH DAY: NORTH DAKOTA NATIVE RETURNS TO CENTURY-OLD FARM TO PLANT NEW PERENNIAL GRAIN

OAKES, NORTH DAKOTA – APRIL 5, 2022

John Luoma will be honoring Earth Day this April by planting a new, perennial grain called Kernza® on his century-old family farm in Oakes, North Dakota. His farming neighbors in Dickey County will be helping him throughout the process. The cultivation will produce a new forage for livestock this season and a new food grain for a growing commercial market by August of 2023. It will also help restore his soil, while likely improving local water quality and storing carbon in the ground through its long roots and perennial capacity.

Who is John Luoma?

John Luoma, a successful engineer and entrepreneur, is a third generation North Dakota native. His grandparents, Albie and Lottie Luoma, and parents, Hilda and Frank, farmed 1,100 acres of this family farm over the course of 67 years. Throughout that time, a wide range of crops and livestock were grown on the land including corn, soy, alfalfa, and flax. Most of the farm has more recently been in the Conservation Reserve Program and part has been rented for producing corn and soybeans. Through John’s research on continuous living cover, specifically, [perennial forage and perennial grains](#), he is pioneering efforts to plant this new crop more expansively on 110 acres in North Dakota. “Here, a lot of topsoil blows away until the corn and soybeans grow. I thought that maybe the perennial crops would be an answer for me,” said Luoma. This is a common problem across the Upper Midwest that impacts many farmers and the watersheds where they live.

What is Kernza?

[Kernza® perennial grain](#) is the registered trade name of the grain from an intermediate wheatgrass registered by The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. This cousin of annual wheat has been grown to provide fodder for livestock, as well as to stabilize the soil for erosion control. It’s now being domesticated as a grain for human food and beverages, like baked goods and beer, or as a whole grain to use like barley or rice. As a multi-functional crop, it’s expected to be sold into grain markets for profit. On forage alone, growers and supply chains estimate one half to one third of production costs can be recouped. The [growing market](#), ongoing research, and the Perennial Promise Grower’s Cooperative are additional incentives for Luoma and other growers who believe in its future as a commercial crop.

For more information, or to reprint a story about this, feel free to read and use the materials [here](#). If reprinting the [full story](#), please credit [Green Lands Blue Waters](#) and author Anne Queenan.

Available spokespersons

Farmers planting and growing Kernza:

ND - John Luoma, jfluoma@gmail.com (Dickey County)

MN - Ben Penner, ben.penner@gmail.com, 507-995-7756 (Nicollet and Scott Counties)

MN - Anne Schwagerl, anne@mfu.org, 952-457-6068 (Big Stone County)

WI - John & Dorothy Priske, priske@centurytel.net, 920-484-3618 Dorothy, 920-948-7925 John (Columbia County)

Perennial Promise Grower’s Cooperative - Carmen Fernholz, fernholz001@gmail.com, 320-212-3008

U of MN Forever Green Initiative, Market Development - Connie Carlson, carl5114@umn.edu, 612-709-6790

U of MN Forever Green Initiative, Adoption & Scaling - Colin Cureton, cure0012@umn.edu, 612-750-4967

The Land Institute - Tammy Kimbler, Director of Communications, kimbler@landinstitute.org, 612-991-4747

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