



# HUNGARY

# CEREALS



## **A Taste of Europe**

### **Hungary - Cereals**

#### **Importance**

Wheat is the most characteristic and important bread crop in Hungary. As opposed to neighbouring countries where potatoes and maize are consumed in larger quantities, Hungarians are widely known as a wheat producing and wheat bread consuming people.

Among cereals, wheat has been produced for over 10,000 years.

The Magyar people settled in the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century AD. By that time wheat was already grown in the region, though millet and barley were far more significant.

Hungary's most valuable natural asset is its arable land. 70 per cent of the country's land area is suitable to farming, 72 per cent of which is cropland. Cereals are produced on 25 to 40 per cent on its arable land.

Hungarian foodways are characterised even today by an adherence to traditions. The three basic items of everyday shopping are bread, milk and a 'something' to be eaten with bread. In recent decades the custom of one major shopping per month has begun to spread, but still could not replace the ritual of everyday shopping. Healthier diets have become common, which still contain cereal-based products, but now favour flour made of durum wheat or spelt, whole grain, whole rice and germinated grain.

Apart from its role in nourishment, references to wheat are frequently encountered on tools or decorative objects, in literature and folk songs as the plant with a special, mythical power and source of nourishment for most Hungarians.

#### **Production**

The tools used for production are generally identical among cereal-producing European nations, and the earliest types are known from excavations. Until the advent of mechanisation the most important tool of soil cultivation was the animal-drawn plough. Primitive ards were gradually replaced by ploughs with asymmetrical shares and more developed versions. Harvesting was done with sickles and later with scythes. Until mechanisation grains were extracted with simple methods (with flails or trampling).

In traditional production the particular tasks were divided between members of the family. Tilling and sowing were always a man's job, while weeding was a task for all members, but especially women. Harvesting with sickles was done by women, while scythes were used by men. Swath laying and sheaf binding was a job for the wife or bigger children. Food and water was carried to harvesters by smaller children, while threshing was more a task for women. Milling with querns was also typically a female task, only replaced by men with the appearance of industrial milling.

Mechanisation, which had started in the 19th century and had become increasingly up-to-date, also influenced cereal production. Large farms and manors were characteristically highly mechanised.

From the 1970s to the coming of democracy in 1989 the country saw the constant development of production methods within a socialist economic structure. Industrial maize and wheat production yielded excellent results, and Hungarian wheat was popular in European markets.

## **Improvement**

The quality of the grain is defined by the proportion of its protein and gluten content. High quality, flinty wheat typically yields flour with a high protein content suitable for the baking industry, while barley with a higher gluten content is more convenient for brewing.

Plant improvement in Hungary goes back to over one and a half century, but its main target has always been wheat improvement. Originally the aim was to raise yields and to produce drought-resistant species, which was later replaced by attempts to create flintier grain and firmer stalks.

The improvement of the Bánkút 1201 and 1205 species started in 1921, and in 1933 the species was pronounced the world's best wheat at the world grain exhibition in Regina, Canada. The Bánkút species was widely produced until the 1960s and remains one of the best stock for improvement. Today the main goals of improvement are the constant growth of versatility and greater yields. The role of research institutes in preserving traditional species is also important. The presentation of the Pannon Wheat Project, which aims to produce breeds that satisfy modern and varied requirements, is an attractive feature of the exhibition, alongside a live show of cereal breeds.

## **Mills and milling industry**

The various types of mill had developed according to the locally available natural resources or live power (draught animal or human) and alongside the advance of technical knowledge.

Watermills had spread to practically every part of Hungary since the early Middle Ages, while dry mills appeared in the 14th-15th centuries. Windmills were introduced to the Carpathian Basin in the 16th century but had not become general until the 19th century. In the late 18th century population growth, water regulation and development in the production of field crops required larger and high-capacity mills.

By the late 19th century steam mills had largely ousted traditional mills though the latter still had an important role in smaller settlements. Revolutionary changes were brought to the milling industry by the roller mill constructed by András Mechwart, the hard-cast steel roll patented by Ábrahám Ganz, Hagenmacher's bolter, the flour evaluation system developed by Imre Pekár, Hankóczy's farinograph and several other Hungarian patents. Budapest was widely regarded as the Mecca of milling and was considered the milling capital of the world. The unparalleled Hungarian milling industry and related engineering was among the world's best in the final quarter of the 19th century.

## **Changes in the use of cereals**

Originally the importance of wheat compared to millet and barley was negligible. In the 11th century wheat bread was regarded as a luxury even in monasteries with a high living standard. Cereals were first made into mush or porridge, later supplanted by baked griddle cakes kneaded with the addition of water, flour and salt. Bread is defined by flour, leavening and baking. The consumption of bread has remained highly popular through the ages. The process of kneading has a defined order and method since ancient times. Traditional bread was typically baked a week before consumption, and preparations had to be started the evening before baking. The pastry baked from the leftovers of dough has always been a children's favourite. The range of sweet and salty pastries and other bread products has constantly become wider and more varied as the centuries passed. A recent invention is a selection of half-baked bread products containing a fast leavening agent, which make the

dough rise while baking. Parallel to the appearance of these products a fashion for traditional 'peasant bread' made purely of natural ingredients is also noticeable, with the rising popularity of vitamin-rich wholegrain products. The present need for healthier nourishment has led to the discovery of wheat grass juice. Wheat grass is obtained by cutting off the germinated grain after the plant has shot. The juice is easily made at home and has proved to be highly beneficial; among other things, its agents check the development of malignant tumours. The juice has a blood-cleaning effect and can be added to dishes as a full-value nutriment. It contains minerals, vitamins and plant proteins, which are especially beneficial for children and the sick.



Baking



Harvest



Harvest



Modern mill



Old mill

