

# Farmers Ranchers and Gatherers of the Southwest

Don Guerra



edited by Giuseppe Biagini



**FRGSW**  
FARMERS, RANCHERS & GATHERERS  
OF THE SOUTHWEST



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The food heritage of the Southwest is as wild and rich as the imagination can conjure.

Yet, surprisingly, many residents and visitors to our region are not familiar with the heritage practices, cultivation or sourcing associated with the key ingredients they enjoy in local products and restaurants. Building awareness through stories of the Knowledge Keepers – Farmers, Ranchers and Native Plant Food Gatherers, who keep this region's food heritage activities alive - can expand appreciation of their contributions to the regional food economy and, more directly, to the critical roles they play in supporting community resilience.

The project Farmers, Ranchers & Gatherers of the Southwest (FRGSW) seeks to expand awareness of these treasures through the creation of an open access digital resource library with mobile use applications. Using the existing Creative Knowledge Platform (CKP), promoted by the International Traditional Knowledge Institute Foundation (ITKIF), the project team has developed a framework to manage library content that allows Knowledge Keepers (KK) to connect directly with artisans, makers, consumers, and visitors to share stories, resources, practices, and products. Through fostering deeper and more direct connections the CKP will support and strengthen links in the regional food chain and local food economy.

For more information please visit: <https://www.frgsw.org/>

**Farmers Ranchers and Gatherers of the Southwest** - Don Guerra

*Printed:* August 2020

*Texts:* **Robert Gamba**

*Credits:* All photos and videos were provided by **Don Guerra**, unless otherwise specified.

*Graphic:* **Luigi Biagini**

All Rights Reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission from the editor.



# **Farmers Ranchers and Gatherers of the Southwest**

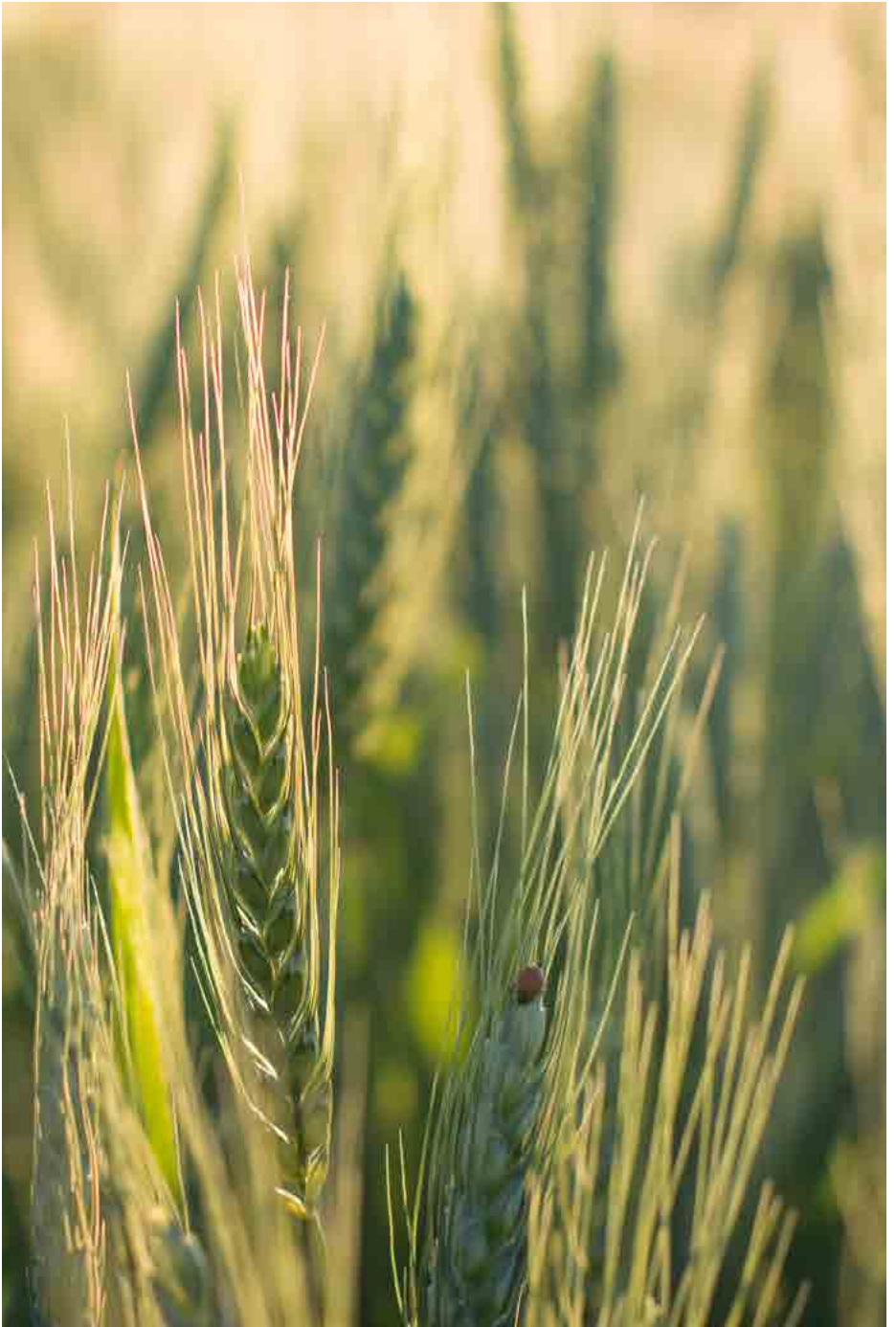
Don Guerra



*edited by:*  
Giuseppe Biagini

*text by:*  
Robert Gamba

*Editorial Project*  
ITKI Foundation



# DON GUERRA

"A Tucson-based artisanal baker, teacher, and entrepreneur, who makes delicious bread using local ingredients, and shares it with his community."

## Background and experience

Just as dough rises in a hot oven, Don Guerra of Barrio Bread has been a catalyst for local food revitalization in Tucson. Starting in 2009 this "community-supported baker" has been working closely with farmers, millers, and retailers to transform local ingredients into distinctive breads. This process combines several grains, including heritage grains such as White Sonora Wheat and Red Fife, and even ancient grains such as Einkorn.



In 2009 Don Guerra founded Barrio Bread out of his garage, following his passion for baking and reaching out to his community. From a bakery in Flagstaff nearly thirty years ago to his own bakery today, Guerra has always been a hard worker, but he had to grow into his role as a baker. "I didn't think about the wheats too much, you know bags of flour. You can open them up and you start mixing bread" Over time, Guerra has transformed his job into an artform. He had a brief interlude where he taught in the Tucson Unified School District for seven years, before baking drew him back in and Barrio Bread was formed. Working with farms such as BKW, Sossaman Farms, and Avalon Gardens, as well as millers from Hayden Flour Mills, Guerra has been at the forefront of revitalizing the actual usage of the grains grown around the state of Arizona for almost ten years. From these farms he obtains modern grains such as Blue Durum, but he also incorporates those heritage and ancient grains listed above. These grains allow him to create and experiment with flour that would have been used hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago. In 2016, he opened his bakery storefront, and is now able to make up to 4000 loafs a week. Even with this increased production, Guerra still delivers to his community on Thursdays.

Guerra's time as a teacher gave him the skills to teach his community about making great bread with local ingredients and a sustainable system in both an online and in-person setting. "The most important thing I can do is to teach what I do, so these traditions are never lost." For Guerra it is important to understand the process, and then share it to ensure that a good bread-making tradition can continue in Tucson.

When he is not baking or teaching, Guerra is also building his business. He has created a community of his own within his own companies. Barrio Grains and Breadlessons.com respectively combine his passion for entrepreneurship with baking and teaching. Guerra still maintains a relationship with the community that got him to where he is now. He delivers online orders every Thursday, and works with farmers to get new, local, tasty grains into his product. Guerra's work ethic has made Barrio Bread a beacon of what local products can do for a community, and not just in the Arizona desert.

"An educator, a baker, and an entrepreneur. These are the three pillars of who I am." This is shown in Guerra's experience and many businesses: his website ([barriobread.com](http://barriobread.com)) offers more information on his many different breads, his variety of grain blends

from his Barrio Grains business, and some recipes. For more recipes and lessons, guests can search [breadlessons.com](http://breadlessons.com) to learn how to use his blends at home.

## **Traditional Knowledge**

Don Guerra's dedication to his craft is centered on Barrio Bread's artisanal bread making. Its signature loaf is known as the "Heritage Loaf", a mixture of heritage grains such as White Sonora Wheat, which has been grown in Arizona since the late 17th century. These mixes include Red Fife, Blue Durum, and Gazelle Rye, all of which arrived in the Sonoran Desert in various times. Guerra uses an ancient French sourdough leavening agent called levain, a fermented mixture of flour and water. His process is simple. "You don't need sugars, you don't need oils, you don't need dairy, you don't need any of it. Flour, water, salt." When mixed and baked by mastercraftsmen, like Guerra, the product is as beautiful as it is delicious. "If you take a really high quality, locally grown, sustainably grown, organically grown grain, and couple it with the methods I have to make a bread product that is low glycemic and low gluten, then it's a win-win." His bread ingredients may be simple, but the recipes require techniques which make the difference in the taste, color, and texture of Barrio Bread.

## **Type(s) of Food**

Guerra has chosen to focus on and perfect only bread at Barrio Bread. His focus on artisanal bread making has evolved as more and different grains are produced, more experimentation can be made, and different blends are offered. His suppliers are those he has always worked with: local farms and farmers dedicated to sustainability and local food economy, just as Guerra is. These include Sossaman Farms in Queen Creek, who provide Einkorn wheat; Hayden Flour Mills, who provide Gazelle Rye; and BKW Farms, who provide Red Fife, Organic Durum, Hard Red Spring, White Wheat, and Khorasan grains. As mentioned before, each of these grains can be used in a variety of blends.

The Einkorn wheat from Sossaman Farms in Queen Creek is of a special note,





photo: Sergio Tapiro



because it is one of the oldest varieties of wheat in the world. To Guerra the bread made with Einkorn grain "is so delicious and nutritious, and fun working with," and is his "pride and joy right now." Even with this grain not traditionally used in the Southwest, Guerra is striving for 100 percent sustainability around him. To that aim, he has grains grown specifically for his use, such as the Einkorn and Gazelle Rye, which he uses in his rye bread. Just as how other experiences shape Guerra's products, his version is inspired from the Polish rye bread he tasted during his trip to Poland. Guerra brings that flavor to Tucson using local ingredients available to him, providing a local experience of a product on the other side of the world.

The levain seems deceptively uncomplicated - flour, water, and salt. Water and flour are fermented to create natural yeast microbes which live in the batter and create the sourdough. Those microbes grow for a period of about 18 hours, and are then ready to leaven bread. Guerra describes a "regenerative process" in that the levain can be used to grow the next day's agent, each culture compounding on the last. Controlling that process and making it consistent is where Guerra's expertise can be seen.

## Motivation

Baking, teaching and entrepreneurship are the core of how Guerra runs his business. Each part of that comes from his own experiences, shown in his own store. "People don't always see it . . . I could tell you a little story about each little thing about my bakery. From plaques on the wall, to bread, to ingredients, to machinery." His growth as a baker is matched by his growth as an entrepreneur. Because he is such a hard worker, he has dedicated himself to several small businesses that can support one another instead of one large conglomerate. He has mixed that with teaching the community around him about sustainable practices and making good bread. It is a belief of Guerra's that "who ever has this knowledge has this obligation to reteach it, and to continue to teach it." This stems from his College of Education and teaching days, but is reflected in his close interactions with his community. Showing those who buy his bread that there is a way to sustainably have good food (from local farmers and businesses) is an important message to send. As important as that message is, Guerra also has fun "just getting in there" and working with the grains, experimenting with ancient grains such

as Einkorn and Red Fife. "Bread is so delicious and nutritious, and fun working with." He has made it his mission to support the revival of heritage grains by providing a delicious product. Guerra also takes time to appreciate the history of the grain and techniques he is using, stating that "It's just so timeless: the loaf I'm making right now could have been made hundreds of years ago." Using the old in new and creative ways is what makes him an artisanal baker - utilizing heritage grains such as White Sonora Wheat is just as important as making it taste good.

His work also champions the struggle of the farmers. He feels that each loaf is not just his story to tell, but the struggles of the farmers and the millers who worked to get the flour to him. It is important to Guerra to make a product that those who support him will enjoy. He wants a farmer to come in and say "Wow, look at what my wheat is producing."

## Challenges

Employing local grains creates its own challenges. The economy has to be right for the local food movement to pick up - the community has to be the right one to support the business. Making that bread available for an affordable price is another challenge: "Sometimes it could be expensive, but I am trying to do it on a level where it makes sense (to) charge a little more for it. Believing in it, and people will definitely want to pay for it once they see the difference." The community that Guerra has built around his bread has thrived so far, but as with any market, there has to be the consumer there to make the production worth it. That support is tied to the success of the community - they rely on Guerra for great bread as much as he relies on them to bolster his business.

Guerra is also ensuring the tradition of bread making is passed onto future generations, both through teaching and by offering his brand of bread. Making sure that both the grains and their usage is not lost on a local level is important to continue the business that he has built. This effort has the added benefit of raising awareness of the local grain movement in order to preserve that traditional knowledge. Making those lessons and ingredients accessible is just one way of doing so. Guerra also likes to challenge himself. The equipment to make bread has not changed a lot. "Lets see how good my skill is when I don't have all the tools I ever wanted." An oven and a simple mixer is all it takes to make the bread. His skill is shown in the control of the fermentation of the levain. While it may be easier to make more breads quicker, Guerra's "Spartan"



photo: Sergio Tapiro



way of cooking with three simple ingredients creates its own unique style. That does not mean that every loaf is exactly how Guerra expects it to be. As with all art, there are some bumps along the road, and experimentation with different blends is not an exact science. However, Guerra still manages to consistently provide great bread to his customers. That creative challenge is part of being an artisanal baker involved with local, organic grains.

## Community

This “community-supported baker” has been a central part of the local food and grain movement in Tucson through a combination of networking and skill, showing the people around him the tasty and healthy products that can be made. The same farmers that provide him with their flour and grains are his own customers, so each loaf he bakes is not just a representation of himself, but of the work that each farmer put into the grain. His work champions the entire community it comes from - from seed, to farmer, to miller, to baker. He does not just want to “trade for the money,” but he wants people to actually want to buy his bread to support his business, and all of those whose work ends up in Guerra's bread. All of that effort is seen in each loaf sold, bringing awareness and teaching about local grains and foods. “The ideas start with me dreaming this stuff up, but then along the way it just “takes a village” to getting steps into the right places.” The movement really began with Native Seed Search, Guerra, BKW, and Hayden Flour Mills coming together to get a great, local product for the community. Guerra stated that “It’s been amazing to have been in Tucson and have developed this sort of concept. Because I really believe if it wasn’t in Tucson, if it wasn’t this group of people, maybe it wouldn’t have gone the way it did.” To Guerra it is more than breadmaking: it is the breadmaking in Tucson with local ingredients and the people living there that make it worth it. The food network that Guerra has been a huge part of supports the community, and in turn the community supports him.



## Join the project

Expand your network, contribute to the local community, explore your territory, and share your knowledge and know-how.

Become a

- Knowledge Keeper: Farmer, Rancher, Gatherer, Food Maker and Producer, etc.
- Knowledge Seeker: Student/Volunteer
- Supporter, Partner, Volunteer

Make an online gift to support the project

---

For more information



Scan the Qr Code!

---



**FRGSW**  
FARMERS, RANCHERS & GATHERERS  
OF THE SOUTHWEST



**ITKI-FUNDATION**  
International - Traditional - Knowledge  
Institute - Foundation

