

> INFORMATION SHEET

WHEAT TIMELINE

Wheat is one of the oldest processed foods in the world and its discovery helped transform Homo sapiens from hunter-gatherers into farmers as communities arose where soil was fertile and wheat could be irrigated.

TIMELINE

10,000 B.C. – The theory is that a cross between three different grass species resulted in wheat.

8,000 B.C. – Wheat has been found in pits in areas where human settlements flourished.

6,700 B.C. – In the stone age, man ground grains of wheat with rocks to make flour. For a long time, meal was used to make only porridge or gruel until the technique of baking was discovered. This made people realize they could grow as well as hunt or gather food.

5,500 B.C. – Millstones used for grinding flour. The ability to sow and reap cereals may be one of the chief reasons why people started to dwell in communities, rather than living a wandering life hunting and herding cattle.

3,000 B.C. – The Egyptians were the first to produce risen loaves using yeast. Their method included used a small amount of old dough, or leaven, to “start” the new dough. Both dough were mixed together and allowed to ferment for some time before baking. Subsequently, the Egyptians were the first to use bread ovens. Bread played an important role in the Egyptian way of life as they paid wages with bread, painted bread-making scenes in their tombs and included bread in tombs to provide food for the afterlife.

1,000 B.C. – Developments in milling techniques began with the invention of the rotary mill, which made better quality flour.

200 B.C. – The Romans were the first to have a milling industry using animals or teams of slaves to drive the wheels to grind the wheat. Before this, grinding of meal had mostly been carried out in the home using a device called a hand-quern. The hand-quern consisted of two round flat stones, one above the other. As the upper stone was turned by a wooden handle, wheat was trickled in through a hole in the centre, and meal came out around the edge. The Romans also began the practice of using sieves to produce finer flour by grinding and sifting the flour through linen twice. This was an expensive procedure that only the aristocracy could afford. The whiter flour obtained was called “pollen” meaning a fine powder. The very best grade they called “flos” a word for a flower, being the best part of a plant. The words “flour” and “flower” originally were the same.

168 B.C. – The Roman Baker’s Guild, or Collegium Pistorum, was created. The word pistorum means ‘to grind’. Soon after the formation of the Pistorum, the government took control of the guild and bread became a regulated public commodity. These professional bakers were freemen and they and their families enjoyed the benefits that all free Roman citizens were entitled to.

1180 – 1190 A.D. – Windmills introduced to Syria, France and England enabled real progress.

1400 – 1600 – In the Middle Ages, windmills and watermills were built close to where the grain was grown. As the population grew, bread making was firmly established as a business and a trade

1700 – 1800 – The Industrial Revolution (1760–1830) was a time of upheaval as the population grew and people moved from villages to towns and cities. As farming improved, so did the quality and the amount of grain harvested. Jethro Tull invented the mechanical seed drill, which resulted in farming becoming less labourintensive and allowed farmers to grow crops on a much larger scale.

1850 – 1900 –The methods for making bread changed as silk sieves were introduced and square or oblong baking tins were invented, to make it easier to slice bread. To meet the demands of the growing population, long-lasting flour was needed. Those elements that spoiled the flour, the outer bran and germ layer, were taken out, although these contained most of the wheat’s nutrients.

1900 onwards – In the early 1900s it was discovered that traditional long fermentation times could be reduced from 18 to 3–4 hours by the use of very small amounts of certain chemicals, called oxidants, in bread or flour. Oxidants, when added to dough, not only sped up the process but also produced a superior loaf. Most of the common machines, such as the roller mill, were developed by the 1900s and are still in use in present-day mills.

Over the 1900s crop breeding advances increased the quality and yield of wheat and production became more efficient due to improvements in management and mechanisation. Inorganic fertilisers have boosted yield and quality, and crop protection has improved so less of the yield is lost to pests, disease and weeds. The increased global trade in wheat has meant that farmers now face competition from many other markets. Modern bakeries are hi-tech and hygienic and yet can still satisfy demands for traditional-style loaves.

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