

# Giving the Gift of Pulses

by **Patty Milligan**



**Simpson Seeds/Westgate Mills Inc. is a family owned and operated pulse processing and splitting plant.**

According to the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 84.4 per cent of people in Saskatchewan contribute to charitable organizations every year. That number has held steady for while. The reasons Saskatchewan citizens say they donate include compassion towards people in need (88 per cent), helping a cause in which they personally believe (87 per cent), and wanting to contribute to the community (82 per cent).

Like the majority of the province, Moose Jaw-based Simpson Seeds has made giving a regular part of their company's operations. In this respect, Simpson Seeds may be completely ordinary. That's how Elyce Simpson-Fraser sees it—she is modest as she talks about three charitable initiatives that the company has taken on. She is the third generation working in the family operation, which has been shipping and supplying high quality pulse products to the global market for thirty years. Officially, Simpson-Fraser is a junior trader for the company, but some of the work she is doing might lead you to think that she is no ordinary junior trader, and that Simpson Seeds is no ordinary company.

In July 2009, a container of split red lentils arrived in India for distribution to hungry people in poverty-stricken areas of the interior. Those lentils were from Saskatchewan—shipped by Simpson Seeds in May and processed by Westgate Mills Inc., a lentil splitting plant that is a division of Simpson

Seeds. It took more than a year of coordination to get them there. Simpson-Fraser organized each step and her family's company footed the bill—from the labour and processing to the stuffing into containers and shipping. The company was motivated to donate the lentils after making a connection with Victory Churches International (VCI) through the Victory Church they attend in Moose Jaw. A VCI contact in India is currently overseeing the distribution of the lentils to anyone who is in need.

Meanwhile, Simpson-Fraser has already coordinated a second shipment of pulses—this time a container of Richlea lentils to Kenya. The recent civil unrest there has created many problems, including food shortages. Simpson-Fraser took on an additional challenge—soliciting the help of other companies to ship the container. She was blown away by their eager response.

"Everyone said yes immediately. We had contributions from every part of the line, donations by the growers, processing and labour through us, the intermodal transportation was taken care of, and the stuffing into containers in Vancouver. Companies were happy to get on board," explains Simpson-Fraser.

With more organizations involved, she hopes it will be possible to send more than one container per year.

Ron Wagner, a Saskatchewan resident working with the California-based organization Gleanings for the

in brief

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## Websites

[www.simpsonseeds.com](http://www.simpsonseeds.com)

[www.gleanings.org](http://www.gleanings.org)

[www.victoryint.org](http://www.victoryint.org)

[www.mcrrha.sk.ca](http://www.mcrrha.sk.ca)

Hungry, says, “There are actually a lot of very generous people who want to assist in feeding the hungry.” That’s what he found when he recently met with Greg Simpson of Simpson Seeds and Francis Gaudet of Belle Pulses at the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers annual Pulse Days conference. Both expressed interest in the work of Gleanings for the Hungry and subsequently donated loads of pulses.

Wagner found an Alberta trucking company to haul the donations to California at no charge where they become part of a soup mix made up of dried vegetables and herbs. Since 1982, an army of volunteers has spent each January to May blending and packaging this soup mix. This year, Gleanings supplied hungry people around the world with 27.7 million 8-oz soup servings. Recent shipments made their way to Haiti, South Africa and Paraguay. Many of the people who received the food were children who, Wagner says, expressed “great delight and thankfulness.”

For Wagner, the addition of peas and lentils is “a huge plus for our soup mix in terms of nutrition because of the high level of protein.” He aims to reach more processors and producers in Saskatchewan and urges those who are interested in donating to contact him. Like Simpson-Fraser, Wagner doesn’t blow his horn very loudly. He maintains, “We have nothing to boast about. We have a clear mandate to feed the hungry.”

The nutritional benefits of lentils are not lost on Jeannie Coe, primary

care nurse at the La Ronge Medical Clinic. When she and her fellow health care practitioners spearheaded the Diabetes Education Network (DEN), lentils were at the top of their wish list. The goal of DEN is to provide support to people with diabetes and chronic disease. A group of 10-20 people gathers one morning each month at a venue in the community to visit and cook. DEN emphasizes foods that provide the best combination of health, cost-effectiveness, and nutrition.

“That,” Coe says emphatically, “is inherently the lentil.”

The Canadian Diabetes Association also specifically identifies lentils as a food that may help control diabetes. Unfortunately, lentils are not found on store shelves in La Ronge. With no budget line for food ingredients, Coe contacted the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers seeking discounted or donated lentils. Almost immediately, she received a call from Elyce Simpson-Fraser, followed by 200 kilograms of lentils from Simpson Seeds—a donation Coe describes as “incredibly generous.”

Simpson-Fraser is happy to support DEN because “it’s really good getting people to realize what lentils can do for their diets. Incorporating lentils in this case is not about hunger, it’s about people’s overall health.” Coe feels it is awesome to have that kind of support from Saskatchewan producers and the response from the participants has been amazing.

Many people in the group had never eaten lentils before. A few participants at first raised their

eyebrows at the idea of a meatless chili, but now they eagerly take home a 2-cup package of lentils and a new recipe developed by DEN’s dietitian. Coe feels uplifted about how things have turned out especially because “dealing with chronic diseases can be overwhelming.” In a community where diabetes is almost endemic, lentils are turning out to be an important food. While she cannot praise Simpson Seeds enough, Coe thinks she will also direct future requests to other processors to get more people involved.

It has been a busy year for Simpson-Fraser. As to what new projects Simpson Seeds may take on in the future, she cannot really say. The fall has arrived and everyone’s attention is on the incoming crop. What is certain is that they will be giving. According to Simpson-Fraser, “It’s not a company policy written on paper. It’s more like a family value.” Simpson Seeds wants to participate in the community locally and internationally, partly to promote pulses, but mainly because Simpson-Fraser says “it’s important to remember where we came from and how we got here. It keeps us grounded. We are incredibly fortunate to be in the position we are in and there is no reason why we can’t share.”

Simpson-Fraser hopes that talking about these endeavors will do one thing—encourage others to give too. Surely there are other ordinary companies out there ready to do some extraordinary work.

bio

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