

# Washington Island Brands, LLC

## Washington Island

◆ Agriculture ◆ Business and Entrepreneurship ◆ Health ◆ Tourism ◆ Community Development ◆ Economic Development ◆

Washington Island Brands, LLC which owns the Washington Hotel, Restaurant and Culinary School on Washington Island, Wisconsin, wanted to work with Washington Island farmers to restore an agricultural economy to the island. Growing a select wheat variety that would be hearty and have excellent qualities for baking products was part of that plan. The intent was for the hotel to mill the wheat into flour to make breads, muffins, bread mixes, and pastries. The opportunity came when the farmers grew more wheat than Washington Island Brands needed for baking.

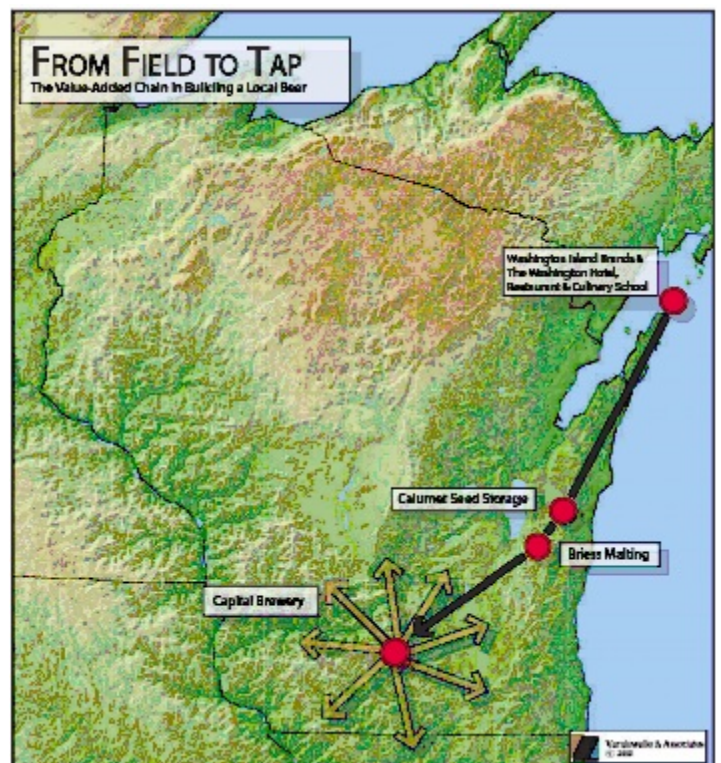
Washington Island Brands worked with Vandewalle & Associates, a planning firm, to determine market opportunities for the excess wheat and to identify end users in the state that could offer them the highest value while still maintaining the integrity of the product and the story of the place. Through their search, Capital Brewery was identified as a potential partner and after some initial meetings at the brewery, meeting the farmers on the island, and understanding the quality and quantity requirements for the wheat by Capital, Island Wheat beer was born.

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute collaborated to make the seed varieties the best they could be. Vandewalle & Associates understood the value proposition and helped to position the product to the appropriate end users. Capital Brewery came on board and with their marketing firm Glowac, Harris Madison, and instantly understood the value of quality ingredients and the connection to the local economy. Calumet worked with the farmers to clean, dry and store the seed in isolated bins. Briess

Malting worked with both

the farmers and the brewery to understand what the end user needed and the producer needed to provide.

Sales of Island Wheat Beer have exceeded all expectations and across the state people are talking about Washington Island. The sale of the wheat has allowed island farmers the ability to work on a more full-time basis and to provide for their families. There has been a rise in tourism on the island, with more people making the trek to see the fields, spend a night at the Washington Hotel, and spend their money at local establishments. The



wheat has also given the people of Washington Island a renewed sense of pride in their place and a belief that they make valuable contributions to the state's product offerings.

As a model, the initiative focused not on what the island could grow and how to sell it, but rather on partnering with existing establishments to use locally-produced raw materials as their ingredients. The next step was then working with the end users and the farmers to determine what were the quality, quantity and formulation requirements of the raw material that would make an easy substitution, or addition, to their process. Then the job was to connect the chain of processors between the producer and the end user. The end result is that local producers have successfully tapped into an existing market that provides stability for the local economy.

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