

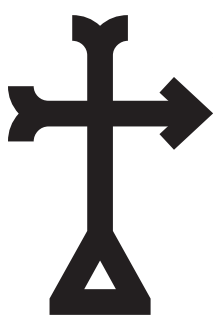


# FARMS

## OF THE FUTURE

### CAMAS COUNTRY MILL AND FOOD RESILIENCY IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY

BY RACHAEL CARNES



To understand the future of the Willamette Valley as a food-producing region, it's a good idea to look at its history. And to get a good look at its history, you have to go back about 50 million years.

Before the Pacific Northwest as we know it was formed, a series of volcanic islands known as the Siletzia Island Chain sprouted up, forming the backbone of what we now think of as the Coast Range.

Flash-forward 10 million years, and “the Siletzia block was accreted onto the North American Plate and covered with a thick pile of sediments,” says Leland O’Driscoll, a research associate at the University of Oregon’s Department of Earth Sciences.

The birth of the Cascade Volcanic Range established high grounds to the east, leaving a topographic trough now known as the Willamette Valley. Especially susceptible to erosion, the unstable volcanic and sedimentary rocks were whittled down by tributaries, trickling minerals downhill into our area over millions of years.

Now set your time machine to 14,000 years ago. A glacial mass dams a river valley in western Montana, producing a large lake. As the glacier begins to retreat, it releases the water from the lake. This happens again and again as the glacier advances and retracts.

The Great Missoula Flood, actually a series of more than 70 floods, was a wild geological event that ripped a chunk of glacier from its moorings and sent an enormous river of accumulated topsoil and mineral deposit throughout the Columbia Plateau and into the Willamette Valley.

So why look to the past?

Because as we move forward, with ever-increasing populations and widening growth boundaries — and as we become increasingly dependent on food sources from outside our local area — this resource, the Willamette Valley as a fertile cradle, a place where food sources can and should be nurtured, becomes all the more compelling.

### DEEP ROOTS

I’m sitting in the cozy Camas Country Mill Store & Bakery off Meadowview Road, just north of the Eugene airport, on a bright, cold day.

The place smells wonderfully of baking bread, and the counters are stuffed with cookies, scones and muffins, all made from Camas Mill’s wholegrain flours. Sue Hunton, a retired sixth-grade teacher, is telling hungry patrons about today’s homemade soups.

Sue’s husband, Tom Hunton, has worked the land since he was a boy.

“My dad had an eighth-grade education,” Tom Hunton says. “Mom went through high school, but from 14 on, dad was self-reliant.”

Tom Hunton’s father, Everett Hunton, and his wife, Ellen, grew up in Harrisburg.

“Mom is 93, and she still does our books, and she goes to the post office and the bank for us every day,” Hunton says. “Her parents were Danish. And now, politically, socially, philosophically, we’ve come full circle. My great-grandfather was a baker in Randers, Denmark, and our millstones come from there.”

As a lifelong farmer, Tom Hunton has seen firsthand the changes in the area, and he and his family have been no small part of that adaptation.