

Grains make up 70% of global cropland. Here's how perennial grains, legumes, and oilseeds could dramatically improve sustainable farming

When left undisturbed, naturally-occurring vegetation tends to grow back year after year. In agriculture, this is also true of perennial crops such as olive trees, asparagus, many types of fruit, and grazing crops for animal consumption. However, agricultural grains, which make up over [70 percent](#) of global croplands, are almost always annual crops that need to be replanted every year.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other 'disruptive' innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

Because of their short lifespan, annual grains are adept at growing quickly and [producing high yields](#). The predictable results associated with annuals are encouraged by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through their [eligibility requirements](#) for federal crop insurance, leaving farmers responsible for the financial risk if they transition away from annuals and other industrial agricultural practices.

Despite these obstacles, perennial grains have made significant progress in the last two decades. In 2009, The Land Institute developed [Kernza? perennial grain](#), the [first commercially available](#) and economically viable perennial grain crop. It is a [domesticated version](#) of wild [intermediate wheatgrass](#) (*Thinopyrum intermedium*) and can be used as a substitute for annual wheat. Kernza's sweet and nutty flavor profile gives a distinctive characteristic to the [wide range](#) of food and beverage products it can be used for. The versatility of the grain, which has a [weaker gluten](#) than wheat flour, makes it a suitable ingredient for bread, cereals, [beer](#), whiskey, and even ice cream.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)