The seeds of my farm dreams fell on fertile soil when I enrolled in the 2013/2014 Farm Beginnings course. I’d recently returned home to the family farm near Drake, intent on deeper involvement in the life of the land and soil after eight years on the West Coast working for non-profits and earning a graduate degree. I envisioned a farm enterprise authentic to our family’s ways of life. Newly employed by Dakota College at Bottineau, eighty miles from the farm, I also needed an enterprise that didn’t require me to live on the farm. I landed on home-milled flour and whole wheat bread. My business, Meadowlark Granary, uses the hard red spring wheat grown on our 500-acre family farm. I produce fresh whole wheat flour with a small kitchen mill and sell flour and an assortment of whole grain breads at the Bottineau Farmers Market, at a farm stand at the Bottineau Tech Center, and through direct orders.

I grew up encircled by family history. If I were to stand in our farm yard and turn a complete circle I could point to the farms where each of my parents and each of their parents grew up, all within a few miles. If I cross the pasture to the east and stand by the barbed wire fence separating grass from prairie trail, I can see the roofs of the barn and house where my Grandpa Frankhauser grew up. My favorite childhood biking destination was south and down a long rutted field road, through a hayfield dotted with purple and lavender alfalfa and fluttering butterflies, ending at the old farmstead where my Grandpa Frankhauser grew up. My mom’s younger sister now lives on the farm six miles west where my mother and her three siblings were raised. Sundays I drive there to have coffee with Aunt Raylene and on the way, I pass the farm where my father grew up, just a mile and half away, now inhabited by his younger brother’s family. This also is the farm where my Grandpa Blumhagen grew up, and just two miles further west I also pass the farm where Grandma Blumhagen grew up. I am surrounded on all sides by the farms that stand as a testament to years of planting and harvesting, losses and bumper crops, by those who have come before me.

Just as grain farming goes generations back, the idea that the grain grown here can be milled into flour here, and consumed here instead of shipped away is also not a new idea. Several years ago I asked my grandmother, who was then over 100, where their flour came from when she was a girl. She told me her Pa hauled several bushels of their wheat off to the mill and brought it back as flour in cotton print flour sacks and that was their flour for the year. North Dakota is unique for having the only state owned mill and elevator in the nation, the North Dakota State Mill and Elevator in Grand Forks, producing Dakota Maid Flour. But few know that my hometown of Drake was the first site of the State Mill, from 1919 to 1924. My mother bought her electric Magic Mill II kitchen grain mill in the late 70’s and still uses it today to produce all the flour she needs. Some of the wheat harvest was always squirreled away in containers in the pantry and any baking session began with running wheat through the Magic Mill. Although they are no longer made, I purchased a Magic Mill II, identical to Mom’s on eBay and use it to produce the flour I sell.

This business is my attempt to show how vibrant and life-filled the Plains truly are, especially in the growing and harvest seasons. And I wanted to put forth a vision for myself of the life I want to build here, rooted and abundant. I chose the Meadowlark, our state bird and symbolic of this place, because it’s sunny song brings to mind bright breezy summer mornings, lush green wheat fields bobbing and waving under clear blue skies, a hope filled and vibrant season. Granaries, too, are ubiquitous on the prairie and symbolize richness and abundance. With storehouses to keep excesses of grain to ward off hunger in lean times, humans were able to thrive and develop civilizations. A grainbin, filled to the top, is the culmination of a spring and summer’s sweat and dust and calloused hands.

Meadowlark Granary is my vision; the vibrance of the sunshine, summer breeze and meadowlark song, captured in those fat red wheat kernels, stored away in the granary and served up as wholesome hearty bread to nourish Plains people. The bakery business is my way of honoring our region’s grain growing heritage and my family’s farming roots, four generations deep. It is a reminder that the crops we grow can be food for us right here and not only commodities to be shipped far away. Meadowlark Granary is my Farm Dream of a vibrant and abundant life on the Great Plains.

Stephanie Blumhagen
New and emerging farmers are in need of resources, interns, loans and grants from FARRMS. For $100 or more, you can provide tuition for new farmers to attend Farm Beginnings and grow their businesses from the ground up.

FARRMS offers privately funded Grants to Grow - giving farmers grants and loans to begin or add sustainable farming practices. Loan recipients are required to attend Farm Beginnings - a Land Stewardship course to prepare farmers to become successful businesses. FARRMS is the only organization in the state to provide this eight-session intensive well-rounded training with experienced farmers and educators. Farmers who successfully finish the course are armed with a farm food safety plan, business plan and networking opportunities.

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- Mentoring and on-site visits
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