Crop update for 2015 hops season

Stephen Carpenter, President and Chief Operating Officer, Yakima Chief - Hopinion LLC

For the most part, the 2015 PNW hop crop is harvested and delivered. While faring better than our German counterparts, the crop in the US had its ups and downs as a result of heat and water issues through most of the summer. Many of the early maturing varieties suffered the most as a result of the challenging growing conditions. The Willamette crop was off in both Washington and Oregon. For the most part, US Goldings, US Fuggles, US Saaz, and US Hallertau were adversely affected by the extreme heat during bloom. Cascades grew well in Oregon and in some parts of Washington, but what appeared to be potentially record yields as harvest neared never materialized. Centennials were a big disappointment in most areas.

Despite the heat, Simcoe® and Citra® performed about as expected and Mosaic® yields exceeded expectations. Amarillo® yields met expectation in northern Idaho, but were disappointing in Washington state overall. There seemed to be more crop issues on land farmed within the Wapato Irrigation District.

Although there was a wide spectrum of alpha analyses and yields depending on the growing region, overall the alpha crop in the PNW was about average. The Nugget crop in Oregon was exceptional for most growers.

Overall quality of the 2015 crop was good to excellent. Weather was as pleasant during harvest as it was challenging during the growing season. Growers in irrigated areas are now anxiously awaiting weather reports as the snowpack this winter will be instrumental in assuring a good water year. Although the rainy season, which started early, has been delayed, a late spring or early summer will still be beneficial for the crop to develop a pleasant balance between the expected characteristics of the base beer and the smokiness imparted by the smoked malts.

In each issue, CBQ spotlights a particular beer style and provides tips from an ingredient and fermentation perspective. In this issue we examine the BJCP category of ‘Other Smoked Beers.’

Malt Notes:
This beer category offers opportunity for both creative and disciplined brewing. Creative because of the vast variety of beer styles that lend themselves to a smoky version. Disciplined because of the need to develop a pleasant balance between the expected characteristics of the base beer and the smokiness imparted by the smoked malts. According to BJCP style guidelines, the intensity and character of the smoke and base beer style can vary, but balance is the key to success. And sharp, phenolic, harsh, rubbery or burnt smokiness is inappropriate.

By Briess Malt & Ingredients Co.

CHILTON, WI—Briess has announced the release of the newest malt in its portfolio—Briess Caramel Rye Malt. At 60° Lovibond, it is described as smooth and subtle, yet surprisingly complex, and can be used up to 20% in a wide range of beer styles for depth and subtle flavor.

Briess officials said that a proprietary process in the drum roaster was developed for this malt.

The process creates touches of caramel and bread crust flavors which complement the spicy characteristic of the rye grain. Subtle spicy rye flavor shines through the layers of caramel and bread crust flavors after fermentation, and it leans toward burnt orange and brown color contributions. This is a versatile malt. Some recommended beginning usage rates include:

- 1-5% for depth in lighter-flavor beers like Pilsner, Oktoberfest and Bock.
- 6-10% adds complexity to malt-forward beers.
- Up to 20% for intriguing softness and slight rye-like character.
- Use in all beer styles for depth and subtle flavor.
- Use Briess Rye Malt or Briess Rye Flakes for more rye flavor, and to complement the smooth and subtle yet complex flavor.
- Use in all rye-style beers for added sweetness, toast flavor and color as well as in Scottish Ales, Doppelbock, Dunkels, Stouts, Porters and other medium to dark ales and lagers.

Briess Caramel Rye Malt leans toward burnt orange and brown color contributions. These pilot brews were formulated at 10% Caramel Rye Malt (left) and 20% Caramel Rye Malt (right).
Introducing the first Briess single-malt extracts

CHILTON, WI — Briess has announced that it is introducing two new CBW® malt extracts to its portfolio, each produced from a single malt:

- CBW® Pale Ale malt extract (6º L at 8º Plato)
- CBW® Munich (8º L)

These single-malt extracts make converting from extract to all grain, or vice versa, easier. And it gives the creative brewer total liberty and control.

Two popular CBW® malt extracts — CBW® Pilsen Light and CBW® Golden Light — are close behind this pair. But with 99% Briess Pilsen Malt and Briess Brewers Malt, respectively, and 1% Briess Carapils® Malt, these malt extracts can’t qualify for the “single malt” category.

Briess Goldpils® Vienna characteristics

This traditional German-style malt is characterized by a unique flavor profile that sets it apart from other versions of this malt offered to American craft brewers. Briess maltsters designed it to be a fully modified, high extract, low protein malt, not just a darker Brewers Malt. This required developing a proprietary malting recipe that involves careful monitoring of the kiln drying cycle and specialized temperature rests. The result is a base malt with rich malt flavors and hints of biscuit and nuts.

CBW® Goldpils Vienna malt extract (6º L at 8º Plato) produces a rich, full-flavor, high-fermentability pale ale using 99% Briess Goldpils® Vienna Malt.

Briess Pale Ale characteristics

Briess Pale Ale Malt has a unique flavor profile that sets it apart from other versions of this malt offered to American craft brewers. Briess maltsters designed it to be a fully modified, high extract, low protein malt, not just a darker Brewers Malt. This required developing a proprietary malting recipe that involves careful monitoring of the kiln drying cycle and specialized temperature rests. The result is a base malt with rich malt flavors and hints of biscuit and nuts.

CBW® Pale Ale malt extract (6º L at 8º Plato)

CBW® Pale Ale characteristics

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CBW® stands for Concentrated Brewers Wort. These brewer’s grade malt extracts are brewed on a 500-bbl state-of-the-art brewhouse, the second largest in Wisconsin.

They are unhopped and non-diastatic to offer brewers creative control. Briess CBW® malt extracts are gently vacuum evaporated to maintain their rich, full flavor and lessen color development, and produced using a multiple step infusion brewing process for high fermentability.

These new styles bring to 11 the number of CBW® malt extracts offered by Briess:

- CBW® Pilsen Light (2º L)
- CBW® Bavarian Wheat (3º L)
- CBW® Golden Light (4º L)
- CBW® Goldpils® Vienna (6º L)
- CBW® Pale Ale (6º L)
- CBW® Munich (8º L)
- CBW® Rye (9º L)
- CBW® Sparkling Amber (10º L)
- CBW® Porter (17º L)
- CBW® Traditional Dark (30º L)
- CBW® Special Dark (90º L)

Homebrew shops and licensed breweries can purchase Briess products from an authorized distributor. Licensed breweries can also purchase Briess products direct. For more information visit www.BrewingWithBriess.com or email info@BrewingWithBriess.com.

Briess adds roasting capacity, barley storage

CHILTON, WI — Briess Malt & Ingredients Co. announced that it has completed two expansions this year that build upon recent acquisitions.

The expansions include the installation of another drum roaster at its Waterloo, WI, malting operation, and adding 1.5 million bushels of storage at its barley operation in Ralston, WY.

“Since the pioneer days of American craft beer, Briess has embraced the small-scale production of artisan beers and developed unique malts and services to help it grow,” said Company President Gordon Lane. “Meeting the needs of craft beer continues to be our focus.

“In the past several years we took complete control of our barley supply chain in order to secure a consistent supply of high-quality barley for malting. Now, as craft beer continues to grow and its demand for malt increases, we will also expand and grow to meet those needs.”

The new roaster will bring to seven the total number of roasters operated by Briess—the three at its Waterloo Malthouse, two at its Chilton Malthouse and two at its Insta Grains® Plant in Chilton. Briess has been roasting malt for beer since the 1980s, and was the first malting company to offer roasted malt to American craft brewers.

In Wyoming, additional storage will help accommodate increased barley plantings for Briess.

“Our Ralston barley operation was recommissioned by Briess, more than doubling the company’s malting capacity. “The Briess family has believed in the American craft beer movement since its earliest days... Today they continue invest to help craft beer continue to grow.”

— Company President Gordon Lane

2013. This year we have contracted for about 5.8 million bushels, and our goal is to continue seeking increased barley acreage and new barley varieties,” Lane continued.

This past January, one of six malt houses on the Manitowoc property was recommissioned by Briess, more than doubling the company’s malting capacity.

“The Briess family has believed in the American craft beer movement since its earliest days,” Lane continued. “Today they continue invest to help craft beer continue to grow.”

Briess is North America’s leading sup.
Briess Expansion

plier of specialty malts to American craft beer, and a leading producer of all natural malt, natural sweetener and other value-added grain and starch-based ingredients for food, beverage and pet food manufacturers.

It has been family owned since 1876 and produces all ingredients in the U.S.A.

Two of four 750,000-bushel bins were installed this summer at the Briess Wyoming Barley Operation. The location also has 10 100,000-bushel bins and is situated along the Burlington-Northern Railroad.

From barley to beer

The color + flavor of specialty malts

Killed Base Malts

Sweet, delicate mild to mild malts

High Temp Kilned Malts

 impart malty, grassy notes

Roasted Caramel Malts

Sweet, mild to intense caramel, toffee, burnt sugar

Specially Processed Malts

Biscuity, toasty, nutty, woody, raisiny, prunes

Dark Roasted Malts

Rich roasted coffee, cocoa

Roasted Barley

Made from raw barley

Coffee, intense bitter, dry

A high resolution, print quality pdf of the 8-1/2” x 11” illustration is available for download at www.BrewingWithBriess.com/Products.
White Labs launches first phase of DNA testing

White Labs is now conducting in-house genetic identification using polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, which allows scientists to definitively determine the genus and species* of the microorganism you are dealing with.

White Labs scientists amplify specific regions of highly variable ribosomal DNA that are flanked by conserved regions and then sequence these amplicons. By examining the 'signatures' given by the microorganism White Labs can determine the relatedness to a genus and species.

Customers can send in an organism that they have isolated at their own micro lab, or White Labs can plate the samples (for an additional cost). The process turnaround time is 3 working days. The price is $139/organism and the part number is LS6705.

Brewers will find that DNA testing of their yeast can provide them with many benefits, including determining contamination and mutations, when the tests are conducted consistently.

PCR fingerprinting can identify and differentiate production yeast strains. This is a valuable tool for checking yeast slopes, detecting cross contamination, monitoring production yeast cultures and in some instances to detect mutations.


White Labs will implement additional testing options over the next few months. White Labs is in the process of rolling out a new analytical service that will utilize qPCR to detect specific beer-spoilage organisms. * Occasionally cannot determine species.

**Construction**

The building for White Labs Asheville has in year's past been used to board police horses, and other functions, and requires a complete retrofit.

The existing building, which has been used in years past for a variety of enterprises including as a tobacco warehouse and stable, is being completely renovated inside and out while maintaining its historic character, including the iconic brick walls where possible.

The building had been used most recently by the water department for repairing trucks and as storage for the school district.

A second new building is also being constructed on the site, with completion targeted for early summer. The combined buildings will span 34,000 square feet of space.

Thus far, much of the work has centered on underground activities, including removing the 100-year-old concrete floor.

The $10 million project will include a tasting room and restaurant. For inquiries regarding the Asheville site including future jobs, construction projects, etc., please write asheville@whitelabs.com.

Next Big QC Day deadline is Feb. 26
A look back at 2015: Thanks to employees, clients

I am writing this as 2015 is coming to a close, and we have a lot to celebrate and appreciate from a very busy year.

Here are some highlights:

• Like much of the industry, we grew substantially in 2015. To accommodate this growth, we added a third building to our San Diego headquarters. An added benefit was a larger break room/cafeteria for our employees. Building 3’s packaging department is a key feature of our newly reinvigorated daily tours.

• We have progressed well with the new FlexCell propagation process and PurePitch packaging. If you are not familiar with this transition, it involves growing the yeast and shipping the yeast in the same container, reducing the need to transfer yeast, which is the stage of yeast production that offers some of the greatest chances of contamination. In 2015, we committed to shipping most yeast in the PurePitch propagation vessels/packages. By the end of the year, the same was true with our homebrew packages. Our surveys have showed most loved the transition, although for those who did not, we introduced many changes to our process and packages themselves to make them better. We will continue to work on improvements.

• We opened a Hong Kong warehouse to better supply the region with fresh, affordable liquid yeast. While we have done a lot of business over the years in this section of the world, having cold storage in Hong Kong of our most popular strains has made them available faster and with cheaper shipping. The opening has generated interest and enthusiasm from throughout the region, and this outreach will continue and improve in 2016.

• We received government approval for opening a tasting room within our office in Boulder, CO. More details about this will come in the early part of the year, but for now I can tell you that it will certainly make the beer experience more interesting for our customers and clients in the area. Like San Diego, the tasting room will feature beers split into multiple sub-batches, each fermented with a separate yeast strain. The beer will be made in San Diego.

This has been a huge challenge for us, but streamlining manufacturing with our FlexCell process, and proving it can work in multiple, smaller remote locations (Davis and Copenhagen) makes us extremely optimistic about the future of this facility.

• Lots of these positive changes are tied to having the greatest staff in the business, and I want to take a second to thank them here for all of their hard work in 2015. All the more so because growth is not always easy. I also want to thank our customers for enjoying this year with us, and I hope you will continue to enjoy your experience with us.

Chris White is President of White Labs Inc. He has a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of California, San Diego. Feel free to write him at cwhite@whitelabs.com about this column.

Style Matters

Too little, too much or harsh smokiness will be a deal-killer. To help avoid those pitfalls, Briess offers two smoked malt styles, neither of which have harsh, phenolic or burnt smoke flavors—Cherry Wood Smoked Malt and Mesquite Smoked Malt.

Styles and Usage

So where’s a good place to start when using smoked malt? Try a favorite light ale or lager style such as cream ale or kolsch. A standard American or German lager will work as well. Use between 10% and 20% Smoked Malt in your grain bill. If it’s a recipe you’ve brewed before, just substitute out an equal amount of Base Malt.

These lighter styles are a great showcase for smoked malt. Each smoked malt will offer something different, and your understanding of what it will bring to a beer is important. Once you’ve noted the profile, begin to experiment. What is too much or too little is often personal, as smoke can be a polarizing flavor.

Another good introduction to smoked beers is to keep your grist right around 10%, and add to your favorite fall style—Brown, Oktoberfest, Munich Dunkel, Porter, or Stout. A darker, malty beer is a great canvas for a smoked malt to co-mingle with other robust malt flavors.

Pairings

There’s a wide variety of smoked foods out there. Smoked beer can go beyond the obvious pairing of barbeque, or other smoked foods like salmon or cheese. A smoked lager is a perfect complement to heavy and rich food. Since the flavor is quite strong, look for strong, rich and heavy foods—cream based pastas, duck, and thick cuts of steak. If you’ve brewed a smoked porter or stout, think dessert, and try it with dark chocolate or a big slice of cheesecake.

Cherry Wood Smoked Malt

• DP 140
• Color 5° L

This is a unique, enzyme-active specialty malt with a blend of pronounced smoke and subtle fruity flavor. It has a malty sweetness and is surprisingly smooth and clean. Use it at these recommended beginning usage rates to develop subtle background flavor, complexity or rich, robust smoky flavor in a variety of beer styles.

• 10% Noticeable smoke character in lighter styles such as Scottish Ales and Oktoberfest.

Mesquite Smoked Malt

• DP 140
• Color 5° L

This unique, enzyme-active specialty malt contributes pronounced smoke and upfront earthy albeit mellow mesquite flavor without the harshness that mesquite can deliver. This toned down flavor is achieved through a blend of mesquite and other hardwoods in the smoking process. It has some sweetness, but is less sweet than Briess Cherry Wood Smoked Malt, and is surprisingly smooth.

Use in a variety of beer styles to develop complexity or rich, robust smoky flavor:

• 5-10% Noticeable smoke character in lighter styles such as Scottish Ales and Oktoberfest.

• 10-20% Pronounced smoke character in lighter styles like Scottish Ales and Oktoberfest.

• 30-60% Noticeable to pronounced smoke character in darker styles like Stouts and Porters.

—By Aaron Hyde, Briess Homebrew Product Manager

Yeast Notes:

White Labs Brewmaster Joe Kurowski has brewed these beers for the company’s on-site Tasting Room, and he says brewers should not be afraid of using Saison yeast because the phenolics can add character to the smoked malt.

(White Labs Saison strains include WLP565, WLP566 and a blend, WLP568; more details at whitelabs.com/yeast.)

He suggests not using saisons that are “over the top” with fruity esters. Additionally, for other strains, he suggests those that “go pretty dry” such as WLP001, WLP007, and WLP051.

— Mike White, White Labs Inc.

Craft Beer Quarterly

The purpose of CBQ is to provide information and tips about brewing from an ingredient perspective—malt, hops and yeast. CBQ is sent each quarter to thousands of professional brewers. CBQ is sponsored by Briess Malt, Hopunion LLC and White Labs Inc.

Editorial:

Mike White, mwhite@whitelabs.com

Advertising:

Mike White, mwhite@whitelabs.com

Production:

Cold Creek Publishing Co.
coldcreekpub@aol.com

For all other inquiries, contact:

CBQ, 28600 Anchorage Lane,
Hayward, CA, 94545
coldcreekpub@aol.com
Special report: Acreage report for the year 2015

Stephen Carpenter, President and Chief Operating Officer
Yakima Chief - Hopunion (YCH HOPS)

In the world of hops, a lot has happened over the past several years. As recent as seven years ago, could anyone have imagined that by 2015 aroma acreage in the United States would surpass alpha acreage or that Willamette, the most popular aroma variety at the time, would no longer be considered in the top 5? How about the fact that varieties with strange names such as Simcoe® YCR 14 cv, Citra® YCR 394 cv, and Mosaic™ HBC 369 cv, would not only be released for the first time, but would become so popular that they require five times the acreage of Willamette?

USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service reports that 2015 hop acreage is up 16% in the Pacific Northwest alone, representing 5,796 new acres across Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

In addition, this year marks the sixth year in a row that aroma hop acreage has increased and the seventh consecutive year that alpha acreage has decreased in the United States. This trend resulted in aroma acreage outpacing alpha acreage for the first time in 2013 and continues through 2015 with no sign of changing in the near future.

As a further sign of hop growers’ willingness to invest and quickly adapt to brewers’ needs, there are now more than 1,250 acres of hops grown outside of the Pacific Northwest. This is an increase of 41% from last year. Local hop farms can now be found in an estimated 19 states, including California, Colorado, Michigan, New York, and Wisconsin. Many of these states had thriving hop cultures at various points in their history and we anticipate capital for infrastructure will continue to flow into new operations as demand dictates.

While the overall view of hop acreage increases is interesting, it is worth taking a look at the specific varieties behind some of these changes. Since 2010, we have seen a three-fold increase in Cascade hops, resulting in this popular variety now being the most planted in the United States. Centennial acreage has also increased 10 times over the same period. Despite this amazing growth, the fastest growing trend belongs to Simcoe®, Citra®, and Mosaic® hops at 20% of total US acreage.

To make room for the plantings of aroma hops in demand from the craft segment, other hop varieties have seen significant decreases in acreage over the same 7 year time span. CTZ (Co-lumb/u/s / Tomahawk/ Zeus) is down more than 7,500 acres, and today, acreage in this key alpha variety is just over 5,000 acres. Nugget acreage is down to half of what it was over the same time period and Galena acreage is less than 10% of 2008 acreage. Willamette, the leading aroma variety in 2008 at over 7,000 acres is down to just 1,400 acres.

Knowing all of this, we have to ask, “Will these trends continue?" In the short term, the answer is probably yes, as craft beer producers target 20% market share by 2020. Long term, the crystal ball is a little hazier.

Will the craft segment embrace more efficient hopping regimes? How will the big international lager producers satisfy their alpha needs if current acreage trends continue? Are there new hop varieties on the horizon which will change the dynamics?

Stay tuned. We wish you nothing but happiness as we face the future together.

Delivering quality: The YCH HOPS approach

Zach Turner
Quality and Sustainability Manager

There are many elements which go into connecting family-owned farms with the world’s finest brewers. With a relatively small number of hop farms concentrated in the Pacific Northwest and an ever-growing base of brewers across the world who are insatiably curious, we hope we will drive change and advance the industry.

Below we have laid out our business cycle across a diagram of how a hop makes it from a grower’s mind to a brewer’s glass. We employ different programs for farming, harvest and YCH’s core business. Our programs were not developed by us in a vacuum but were designed collaboratively over time with our partners, in either brewing or farming, and have taken on names and purposes which held value for their creators. I won’t go into great detail on each here but in the future we will be publishing more information to further communicate our tools, reveal how we use these programs and demonstrate their progress.

Select Botanicals Group, LLC

YCH works closely with Select Botanicals Group, LLC (SBG), the breeding and field management group behind Simcoe® that also co-owns the HBC hop varieties. Beyond just breeding, SBG manages the production of Simcoe®, Mosaic®, Citra® and Equinox® hops for YCH to ensure reliable availability of high quality hops. Their Certified Select™ program covers root stock management for purity including annual roguing of every field for males and off-types, specific guidelines for training, harvest windows and kilning, and providing year-round crop management and grower support.

*Simcoe® YCR 14 cv, Citra® YCR 394 cv, Mosaic HBC 369 cv, Citra® YCR 394 cv, and Equinox™ HBC 366 cv are registered trademarks of Select Botanicals Group, LLC (Brand YCR) and/or Hop Breeding Company LLC (Brand HBC).
GreenChief™: Yakima Chief - Hopunion’s farm quality and sustainability program explained

The GreenChief™ program originated at Yakima Chief, Inc. when growers saw the need to address quality and sustainability at the farm to remain sustainable for the long haul. The Yakima Chief grower-owners developed their own best practices team, sustainable practices survey, cost survey and harvest food practice guidelines. These pioneering hop growers knew that to remain competitive (this was before the craft boom), they had to compete together on quality and sustainable practices (in regards to cost, environment and society).

Now 15 years in the making, the program has recently become more focused on quality and harvest best practices as the original Yakima Chief growers have been joined by over 25 other growers in the YCH HOPS community. We’re currently striving to foster strong baselines for hop quality and harvest practices. In 2015, our recurring best practices meetings have brought together farmers from Oregon, Washington and Idaho to discuss best harvest practices, grower feedback, powdery mildew management, dry hopping and hop backs at Bale Breaker Brewing Co. and more.

We hope to not only promote and develop strong practices for traceability, harvest facilities, farm sustainability, grower feedback and reporting, but to also promote collaboration between farms, suppliers and brewers. There is a lot to the program these days which we’ll dive into in another post.

Hop Selection – YCH’S Grower-Brewer Feedback System

At YCH, we view hop selection as an interdepartmental quality program which contributes to fulfilling brewer preferences for particular flavor profiles and helps provide essential quality data to our GreenChief™ farm quality program. While selection originated as a way for brewers to evaluate the current crop and choose hops for their specific needs, it has evolved into the premier way we communicate brewer feedback to farms. It is aimed at improving hop quality and brewer communication systems through the use of harvest data, transparent communication and candid feedback. By participating in selection, a brewer’s qualitative commentary will be used to allocate hops to contracts and help specify consistent blends for the entire brewing community. Ultimately, all the specific feedback and any corresponding lab data will be provided directly to the farms so correlations can be made between sensory, analytics, and best farming practices.

ISO 9001 and 14001 Systems

We run our business according to internationally recognized principals of continuous improvement under which we have developed a quality and environmental management system certified to the ISO® 9001 quality management system and ISO® 14001 environmental management standards. These specify, control and provide for continuous improvement of the way we work throughout our business. The system uses GreenChief™ and Hop Selection as conduits for feedback across the value cycle to ensure we are providing value to all of our partners. Yakima Chief was an early adopter of ISO® 9001 in 1998 and the first hop company to implement an ISO® 14001 certified environmental management system in 2010. We have been hard at work at our Yakima facility (formerly Hopunion) to deploy the same ISO® 9001 system this harvest and will be certified later this fall. ISO® 14001 certification will follow in the next year or so.

Lean Manufacturing

While our quality systems provide structure, principals of Lean manufacturing provide tools to enable our employees on the front lines of service and production to affect change, reduce waste and improve quality of work, service and product. In 2015, as part of bringing the cultures of Yakima Chief and Hopunion together and to address challenges we have faced in inventory control and customer service, we provided more than 4000 hours of Lean training to employees. This included a one-day class for all staff members and focused, week-long Kaizen events to tackle specific process improvement opportunities and build skills within departments to help Lean take root within YCH.

Quality Throughput

We’ve adopted these many systems into the way we manage YCH HOPS to help us grow well. The growth of the craft brewing industry has put our company in the right place at the right time and we’ve seen tremendous change in a very short amount of time. As we grow and build, our aim is to instill a culture of quality into the fabric of YCH HOPS which, while we’ll stumble from time to time, will lead us continuously to creating better ways of working. Whether you’re a brewer, a farmer or a coworker, our commitment is to continue the dialogue of how we work and together ensure communities everywhere a steady supply of delicious hoppy beer.

Alpha King Challenge

Überbrew, a small 10-barrel microbrewery out of Billings, Montana brewing a broad range of bold, innovative beers, won first place during the 17th annual Alpha King Challenge at Rock Bottom Brewery in downtown Denver. Überbrew took the crown with their Alpha Force Double Tap Tactical India Pale Ale defeating 115 entries from 74 hop-forward breweries. This trailblazing brew was the first black IPA to ever finish in the Challenge’s top three and was created by Head Brewer, Mark Hastings along with Connor Cranston and Matt Eisele.

Alpha Force Double Tap Tactical IPA, not to be confused with the other beers in the Alpha Force series, is a dark brown to black, hop-heavy beer with 8.5% ABV and over 100 IBUs.

It is one of three black IPAs that Überbrew has created, including Black Hops Tactical IPA and Black Hops 2. As the creator of these popular beers, Hastings is no stranger to the techniques of brewing a solid dark IPA. He and his team chose seven hop additions in the mash, kettle, dry hop and bright tank, including Warrior, Citra® and Simcoe® varieties.

Placing second and third in the competition were Melvin Brewing Company of Jackson, WY with 2 x 4 Double IPA and Belching Beaver Brewing Company of Vista, CA with Pound Town Triple IPA. Both breweries are former Alpha King Champions earning the crown in 2012-2013 and 2014, respectively.

Other breweries in the top 15 include: Cellarmaker Brewing, Sun King Brewing, Pizza Port—Carlsbad, barley Brown’s Beer, Altitude Chophouse & Brewery, Cannonball Creek Brewery, Sunriver Brewing, Canteen Brewing, Second Street Brewery and Pinthouse Pizza.

Registration for the 2016 Alpha King Challenge begins September 5th and is open to commercially licensed breweries throughout the United States.

— Cait Kerton
Digital Media
Farm perspectives: A 50th harvest celebration

Cait Kerton
Digital Media

Over the past 100+ years, the Pacific Northwest has become entwined with families dedicated to growing and producing quality hops. From growers and field workers, to operations and analytical lab crews, the hop community here runs generations deep. At YCH HOPS, we are fortunate to work and connect with many people who have built their lives around hops and are engrained in the industry. They provide a personalized and unique perspective on the history of hops, and tell a story about the value of agricultural living like many people have never heard before.

Joe John Torres is one of these people. As an employee of Carpenter Ranches in Granger, WA, Joe is a seasoned hop veteran in the area. This year, he celebrated his 50th hop harvest at 70 years old and is the longest-running employee on the farm.

Torres began working at 20 years old in 1965 when Craig and Brad Carpenter, now owners of Carpenter Ranches, were just at the ages of three and one, respectively. Since then, Joe has worked alongside four generations of the Carpenter family and has been joined on the farm by three generations of his own family, including his wife. Torres’ kids and grandkids have also grown up on the ranch, attending school and playing sports with kids in the Carpenter family. He has become such a part of the family that Craig still calls him “tio,” meaning uncle in Spanish.

During his 50-year tenure in the industry, Torres has been involved in just about every aspect of the hop growing process. On top of running the picking machine for 33 years, he’s worked in tilling, and is considered an expert at installing trellises and new hop yards. The Carpenters estimate that 90-100% of the trellis currently installed on the ranch have been built and/or overseen by Torres, which he says is his favorite type of work. In addition, he enjoys the fast-paced, exciting work involved in the harvest season.

Now, after half a century of experience, he oversees roughly 50-60 people through the hop growing season, including the picking machine crew and kiln crew. A major aspect of his job during harvest is monitoring the flow of hops to ensure that varieties do not intermix and brewers are being delivered the correct product.

Torres’ dedication to his work at Carpenter Ranches is demonstrated through his attendance. In 50 years, Joe has only missed two days of work, despite long hours starting at 3:30am and working well past 5pm. Four years ago, Torres attempted to retire from the industry, only to come back just a few weeks later. When asked why he felt the need to return, he simply said he couldn’t stay at home and that he works to give Craig a break. With a short laugh and a smile, he added that there were “too many honey to-do lists at home.” According to Craig, he doesn’t need to be told what to do at the ranch. He knows what needs to be done to ensure that everything runs smoothly and is committed to making that happen.

Through the years, Torres has witnessed dramatic changes in the industry, involving technology, efficiencies and technique. He’s gone from working with the original Regimbal hop deviner when he started working on the ranch, to the Dauenhauer around 1968, to the Carpenter’s own custom deviner.

Joe’s historical perspective, wealth of knowledge and appreciation for the craft of growing hops makes him an invaluable employee and family member at Carpenter Ranches.