

Sustainability Newsletter Week 58: Sept. 22-26, 2008.

Topic: Happy Oktoberfest: Organic/Local Beer!



Although the beer at La Crosse's Oktoberfest is probably not organic, much of it is local/Wisconsin beer (City Brewery, Miller, Pearl Street Brewery, etc.). Organic brews can be found at various tavern establishments and grocery stores in La Crosse.

Background:

-Beer is made mainly from barley and hops, and with wheat for "wheat beers." Commercial production of these grains involves the use of herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides, as well as fossil-fuel derived fertilizers. Hops are particularly susceptible to fungus, which conventional growers treat with large amounts of fungicide. These chemicals pose threats to human health and the environment.

-The transportation of beer around the world consumes fossil fuel resources. According to The Rodale Institute, the average American meal travels 1,400 miles. When part of that meal includes beer, a heavy liquid often distributed in a heavy glass bottle, which waits to be consumed for days or weeks in a refrigerated case, the fossil fuel consumption is particularly large. Additionally, more than 10% of US beer is imported, journeying from even farther distances to reach American consumers.

-Currently, the small scale of organic grain production for beer also requires fossil fuels to transport these grains to brewers. Because of the present small demand, there are only a few providers of certified organic malt in North America, and organic hops must be imported from New Zealand, for the most part. Organic brewers hope that with increased demand for their product, there will be a greater incentive to grow more organic barley and hops in the United States. This will not only help small farmers, but will also reduce the amount of oil consumed in transportation.

Organic:

-Organic beer gives the environmentally conscious consumer a better alternative. Organic beer allows harmful substances to not be introduced into the environment or into the food system. Making beer with organic grains supports a farm system that enhances soil fertility, increases species diversity, conserves water, and produces fewer greenhouse gases.

-There are relatively few bottled organic beers on the market, but they gladly identify themselves on the label. "Certified Organic" beers are made with organic ingredients following all of the standards set by the USDA, which include standards for chemicals used to clean breweries. Beers "made with organic ingredients" are made from organic grains, but not processed in certified organic breweries. Both types of organic beers support organic farmers.

Local:

-Microbreweries have become very popular over the last few decades, as they allow beer to be brewed in small vats even in confined urban spaces. Buying local beer reduces the amount of fossil fuels used in shipping, and supports smaller, local businesses. Many restaurants have their own microbreweries on premises, and most regions now boast regional beer-makers. West Coast and Midwestern microbreweries have a greater opportunity to purchase locally-produced organic beer crops.

Here are some breweries that have organic beers:

Wisconsin Organic Brews:

Pearl Street Brewery: Offers their That's What I'm 'Talkin' 'bout Organic Rolled Oat Stout

New Glarus: Offers their Organic Revolution

Other Wisconsin breweries can be found at:

<http://www.beertown.org/apps/craftbrewing/locator/breweries.html>

US-Wide:

Anheuser Busch: Their Green Valley Brewery label makes two organic beers-- Wild Hop Lager and Stone Mill Pale Ale.

Butte Creek Brewing Co.: Makes Organic Ale, Organic Porter, and Organic India Pale Ale.

Goose Island Beer Co.: Their organic Lamar St. Pale Ale is available exclusively at Whole Foods Markets.

Peak Organic: Distributed on both coasts and going national, Peak Organic makes Pale Ale, Nut Brown Ale, and Amber Ale.

Wolavers: The most widely distributed organic in the U.S. Produces an India Pale Ale, a Pale Ale, and a Brown Ale in addition to an organic hard cider.

West Coast:

Bison Brewing: Their organic Chocolate Stout is a nice offer for those who enjoy thick stouts.

Crannog Ales: Canadian certified organic beers. Choose from Beyond the Pale Ale, Red Branch Irish Ale, Back Hand of God Stout, Hell's Kitchen Ale, and Old Mill Flax Ale, as well as seasonal ales in the fall. Crannog doesn't bottle its beer, but sells it in five and fifteen gallon kegs. Produced in British Columbia. Crannog Ales operates a zero-waste facility; brewery is part of a certified organic farm.

Eel River: Eel River produces its line of Certified Organics including an Amber Ale, a Porter, and an Extra Pale Ale in Fortuna, California. Distributed in many western states, their beers can also be ordered on their website.

Fish Brewing Company: Produces Fish Tale Organic Amber Ale and Fish Tale Organic India Pale Ale which is sold throughout the Northwest.

Pacific Western Brewing: Produces NatureLand Organic Lager, Canada's first certified organic lager. Distributed in British Columbia and Japan.

Midwest:

Kraftbrau Brewery: Produces a Dusseldorf-style Alt Beer for winter and an English Pale Ale for summer made with certified organic barley and hops. Winter batch is available in bottles, and summer beer is on tap or in half-gallon jugs for take-out. Visit the brewery in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Lakefront Brewery: Produce Lakefront Organic E.S.B. Ale (Extra Special Bitter) which can be found in Wisconsin, New York, Illinois, and Ohio.

(Source: <http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/113/beerpr>).