

OPENING SESSION

LOCAL GRAIN AND MALT: A RENAISSANCE BEING NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY DON

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ABSTRACT

In 2013, a group of 8 micro-maltsters got together and formed the Craft Maltster's Guild. The mission of the guild is to promote and educate the general public about the tradition of craft malting in North America, provide educational opportunities to its members and to the general public, and to improve and uphold the highest quality and safety standards for Craft Malt.

The guild's members operate in parts of North America where *Fusarium* and DON levels in grain are a major concern. These areas include New England, North Carolina, Quebec, Michigan, and Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, New York and California. Within the next 5 years, dozens of craft maltsters will be opening up shop all over North America, trying to meet the consumer demand for more locally sourced ingredients.

In accordance with the guild's bylaws, "Craft Malt is defined as a finished malt product, produced from a variety of grains including but not limited to barley, wheat, rye, millet, oats, corn, spelt, and triticale. Craft Malt is in particular made using a majority (greater than 50% by weight) of locally grown grains as inputs, meaning grains grown within the region of the Craft Malthouse." This definition of Craft Malt was a unanimous decision made by all 8 founding members as a proud distinction of what our small but emerging industry represents. Coming from many backgrounds such as farming, engineering, and social work, we all started our operations to provide our local craft breweries with malt that comes from local farms. Our local malts are more expensive than commercial malts and in order to command that higher price, we are offering a product that craft brewers can market as "homegrown".

The challenges of operating a micro-malthouse are substantial. Malting Equipment is not easy to procure and the learning curve to manipulate grain into malt is steep. For all the challenges we face, the largest is finding a good reliable source of quality grains. As many of us know, "Good malt starts in the field". For many of us, finding the correct varieties to grow in our region is a huge hurdle. In New England we only consider growing barley and wheat varieties that have *Fusarium* resistance. It is the #1 reason why we reject an otherwise suitable lot of grain. We have seen DON levels over 8 ppm and many times these numbers discourage farmers from ever trying to grow grains again.

In New York, legislation was passed in 2012 requiring all breweries wanting to operate as a Farm Brewery to use 20% NY State grown ingredients in their beer. In 10 years the requirement for licensed Farm Breweries will be 90%. Within the 10 months since this legislation has been implemented, 15 Farm Brewery Licenses have been issued. This legislation was meant to spur a strong local economy; giving farmers a new crop to grow, craft brewers incentives such as being able to sell pints out of the brewery, and ultimately giving consumers some great locally grown beers to buy. In theory, laws such as these sound great but in actuality there was not enough malting barley grown this past year to support even 15 small breweries at 20%. Why? Three letters: DON. According to a Cornell Field Crops Specialist,

“50-75% of this year’s malting barley crop had DON numbers over 1ppm. There are currently over 2000 acres of Winter Malting Barley planted in NY and over 1,000 acres of Spring Malting Barley is expected to go in the ground this spring. This may seem like insignificant acreage to many used to mid-west production however, it is significant in our region. With a huge market demand for local grains that is willing to pay a premium, it could equate to over \$2.5 million for that 3,000 acres planted.

This is just one example of what is happening around our country with a renaissance in local grains and malt. Similar legislation to what Governor Cuomo passed in NY is being proposed in other states. Many states have seen the economic impact of local vineyards and wine trails in their state and want to see the same attention to locally grown, regionally distinct products coming from craft breweries as well. With all of the positive goodwill going into these emerging grain and malt industries, we cannot forget that all of it could be dampened out by the threat of DON. No matter how high the demand and how great the premium a crop may bring, if you are going to lose it 3 years out of 5 to DON, you are not going to continue grow it and take that risk. Corn is a much better bet. If funding is not put into researching resistant varieties and good cultural practices for growing DON free grains, this renaissance will never get off the ground.