

North Carolina Beer Guild Listening Session

Fullsteam Brewery, Durham, NC

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Partners: Chris Reberg-Horton, Organic Cropping Specialist; Molly Hamilton, Extension Assistant; David Marshall (david.marshall@ars.usda.gov); Randy Weisz, Small Grains Specialist; Fred Gregory, NC ABC; Ron Fish, NCDA Agribusiness Development; Win Bassett, NC Beer Guild; Shivaugn Rayl and Jared Cates, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association; Richard Mitchell, NC Brewers Cup.

About 25 people attended. NC Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council members present: Uli Bennewitz, John Day, Debbie Hamrick.

Climate: Concerns were raised about production of beer inputs (e.g., grains, hops) in North Carolina as a limiting factor to growth of the brewing industry. Hops thrive in cool weather and heat will reduce yields. Most commercially available hop varieties are adapted to northern latitudes with long day-length. More varieties that are adapted to NC are required (see examples of South African varieties and Jeanine Davis' field trials).

Consistency: Brewers are demanding local grains and hops for beer-making, but some local producers cannot consistently meet the quality specifications of brewers (e.g., alpha levels in hops, cleanliness in grains). Consistency of supply is also an issue; brewers require very large quantities of grain and hops to produce beer commercially. Current input production levels limit brewers to using local products only for "one-off" or special batches.

Technical Assistance: Hops must be stabilized (through pelletization) quickly before they lose their desired characteristics. Hops growers would benefit from learning more about the pelletizing process and coordinating on use of a pelletizer and selling cooperatively. Another area of required technical assistance: learning how to grow hops without synthetic nitrogen to meet demand for organic hops while maintaining saleable alpha levels. Lastly, participants requested information about the hops research going on in NC and about how to connect with hops growers to find hops (see Southern Appalachian Hops Guild, or Jeanine Davis). Similarly, one participant asked for a way to connect with farmers to get "adjuncts" for beer, like herbs and honey.

Market Assessment: There was general consensus that the input demands of brewers could not be met in the near future by local production, though many expressed an interest to source NC grains, malted grains and hops citing that their consumers are demanding it and they could pass along some costs in the final end product. These examples were shared:

- "A 10 barrel system requires 600 pounds grain for each barrel, and 4-10 pounds in hops followed by another 6 pounds of dry hops in the end." This brewer used a combination of pelletized hops and cones.

- “We want to transition over to all NC grains. Ability to use those kinds of grains we are all about it. We are using what we can. If all of us were to go out and do it we would wipe ‘em out.”
- “We brew 450-800 pounds of grain in one batch and I brew 7-10 batches a week. Hops could be 4-8 pounds per batch.”
- “There’s a lot of grain being used and a lot of breweries that would love to source it.”
- “we probably use 30-40 different grain products at Mystery in any given year. Different grains some wheat, some rye, I don’t know how much of that is available....base grain and then there’s specialty grain. If you’re looking at 100% NC product, it’s less farmer and more maltster.”

Malting Expertise: Several participants discussed the lack of technical expertise and availability of malt houses, suggesting that malt houses were the bottleneck to getting grain for brewing. It was also suggested that NC malt houses are working hard to meet demand, but do not have enough capacity to process. One participant suggested recruiting malting “craftsmen” from Europe to train malters in NC.

Distillation: participants identified craft-distilled spirits as a high-value option for some brewing operations. Distilling would also offer brewers a way to manage the fluctuations in input availability; one participant said “you don’t need all the varieties to distill.” Participants clarified that tasting permits are available from the ABC for \$100 for locations that craft-distill spirits and want to offer samples.

Grant Support: Participants, both brewers and farmers, outlined the need for funding to purchase equipment that cleans grains for shipping to the malt house. One example: a farmer grew barley in Wake County, shipped it to Charlotte to have it cleaned and then to Asheville to have it malted.

Distribution: Some brewers self-distribute to avoid competition with national brands in the distribution process. Many distributors will offer clients big, national brands that are marketed as “craft”, but not the local brands. One participant described this as taking a “backseat to bigger breweries.”