



American Malting Barley Association, Inc.

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Brewing Industry Needs a Diverse Supply of Malting Barley

The North American brewing industry has long relied on domestic barley production to produce the beers enjoyed by consumers. US production is almost exclusively dependent on six-rowed and two-rowed varieties that have been developed in North America. These varieties are adapted to the soil, weather patterns, and disease pressure in different regions across the US. The diverse climatic conditions and broad geographic distribution of barley production reduces the chances of major supply shortages of malting barley.

The industry is dependent on all regions for the 115 million bushels of malting barley needed each year by the domestic brewing industry. “Idaho, Montana and North Dakota are the major producing states in the US” according to Dr. Mike Davis, President of the American Malting Barley Association, “and each of these states has available cropland to respond to increases in industry demand.” While each state has regional climatic conditions favorable to certain varieties, as a whole, Idaho may be well positioned to respond to the need for two-rowed varieties that do well under irrigation, Montana to dryland two-rowed types, and North Dakota to six-rowed varieties. There are a number of other states such as Colorado, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming that have regions where significant barley acreage exists which helps to further expand the geographic distribution of malting barley production.

There are also areas where malting barley has not been grown for many years, but where it is returning on a very small scale. This production is being driven primarily by smaller brewers interested in sourcing their raw materials in state. Not only is production returning to these areas, but in some cases small malting facilities are being constructed to meet these regional demands for malt. Expanding into these new areas is not as simple as contacting local farmers and supplying them with seed. It requires regional variety trials to determine which of the current malting types are best suited to that region. There are also crop production practices that need to be adjusted such as fertilization, harvesting, and storage to achieve satisfactory quality. In the end, there may be the need for the development of new varieties that are suitable for growing in these secondary production regions.