



American Malting Barley Association, Inc.

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Press Release: Barley Production - Versatile and Sustainable

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Milwaukee, WI – May 14, 2015 – There have been significant changes to the pattern of barley production in the United States, but its importance in a variety of food products, regional use as a feed ingredient, and crop rotations make continued production essential. With recent declines in acreage, barley's primary end use has moved from feed grain to the higher value malting.

Beer immediately comes to mind as a product made from barley malt, but considerable amounts are also used in distilling and by the food manufacturers. Check the label of your favorite breakfast cereal, bread, crackers or energy bar, and you are likely to find that malt in one of the ingredients. Malting barley is not just versatile as demonstrated by its end products, but is increasing in its geographic distribution. The branding of products made from local ingredients have brought barley production back to regions that have not produced it for 100 years and in some cases, never produced malting barley. This geographic diversity brings opportunities to growers and end users alike.

Barley's growth habits add to its diversity and make it an ideal crop to fit into sustainable agricultural practices. It is a low input crop and has the ability to grow in moderately saline or alkaline soils where many other crops do not do well. It germinates and grows under cool conditions, rapidly shading the soil and crowding out weeds with a reduced need for herbicides. The short 90 days or less to maturity means less water is needed to produce a crop, helping it escape droughty conditions in rainfed production areas, or requiring less water when irrigated. This is particularly true for fall sown varieties that make it through the grain filling period before the hottest summer days occur. In some areas, winter barley comes off early enough to produce a second crop which is often soybeans.

Winter barley also has environmental advantages in fields prone to erosion. Increased winter barley production was supported by the Chesapeake Bay Commission as a cover crop that protects soil and nutrients and prevents the migration of fertilizers from crop fields to the Chesapeake Bay. Many other watersheds could also benefit from winter cereal production.

"There is more to be done to improve the sustainability of barley production" according to Dr. Michael P. Davis, President of the American Malting Barley Association (AMBA). "AMBA is funding research to help increase the winter hardiness of barley and its resistance to biotic and abiotic stresses. Improved disease resistance for example, would lessen the need for fungicides" he said. Barley is indeed versatile and sustainable, but as Davis noted, more needs to be done.