

Just Barley Texan

Texas A&M AgriLife Researcher Helps Restore the Pride in your favorite Texan Brew

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Brandon Ade, owner of Blacklands Malt LLC.

Prepare for some bad news — that twinge of Texas pride you feel when kicking back with a Shiner, Real Ale, Rahr & Sons or Deep Ellum brew may be artificial.

“There’s a lot of pride in knowing where a product comes from,” **Blacklands Malt** Owner Brandon Ade said, “and right now the average beer consumer doesn’t realize that only the water comes from Texas and nothing else.”

While “nothing else” may be a little too absolute, it is true that of the four major ingredients necessary to brew beer (water, hops, yeast and malt) only the water comes from the state of Texas.

“We’ve used local wildflower honey from Sunnyvale Honey Farms, and that is about all I can think of, unfortunately,” **Deep Ellum Brewing Company** Head Brewer Andrew Huerter said.

Hoping to produce the first beer from truly Texan malt, Blacklands Malt partnered with Russell Sutton, an assistant research scientist with Texas A&M AgriLife Research in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences. Ade and Sutton started with barley, collaborating on research underway in Thrall, McGregor and Castroville. The goal: to find a strain of barley that adapts well to the Texas climate. That barley can then be grown by Texan farmers, malted in Texas and sold to Texas breweries.

“Hopefully out of all that we can find a barley that will produce well for [Blacklands Malt] in Texas and make good malt out of it,” Sutton said.

Right now, malt-quality barley isn’t grown in Texas at all. “There is absolutely zero history or data that exists for barley growing in Texas,” Ade said. Past research attempts with Texas A&M AgriLife were geared around developing an entirely new strain of barley specifically for Texas. The cost of developing the new strain, however, deterred the Dallas-area restaurants who had approached Sutton for help.

“We gave them some lines, but nothing ever came from that,” Sutton said. “First they told us money is no object, but when we told them how much it became an object.”

This time around, Sutton is testing existing strains of barley to see which will flourish. “We have about 30 varieties that we’re trialing, and of those 30 we’re hoping that maybe five of them will adapt well to the Texas environment.”



Barley plots, currently growing in McGregor, Texas.

There's more at stake here than simple Texan pride. If Ade can start growing malt-quality barley in Texas, it could create an agricultural boom for local farmers.

"To start, you'll develop rural economies," Ade said. "If a local farmer can break out of the commodity grain cycle, they won't rely on global fluctuation in the market to set a price per bushel for their grains... if I contract directly with a farmer, we can come to an agreement that's beneficial to both of us."

That's not the only potential benefit. With a state as big as Texas, simply shipping ingredients to brewers from out of state creates unnecessary overhead.

"Right now, Texas brewers have to outsource their malts from the northern US, Canada, Europe, Australia..." Ade said. "If instead of thousands of miles away we can source barley from within Texas, you'll see immediate impact on transportation costs and reducing our carbon footprint."

Regardless of how much money Blacklands Malt stands to make by being first to market in Texas, Ade is really only dreaming of one thing.

"I hope that in 2013 I can drink the first beer brewed with malt from Texas," he said. "That's my dream and I hope I can share that with the people around me."

By Lawrence Sonntag

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