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Farm Brewery Law Presents Opportunities, Challenges

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 By Amy Halloran New York Correspondent

RENSSELAERVILLE, N.Y. — More than 100 people turned out for a workshop Saturday to learn about growing, processing and procuring barley for craft brewing in New York state.

The event was held at the Carey Center for Global Good in Rensselaerville.

The market for New York-grown barley is expanding, especially in light of the state's new farm brewery legislation.

As was the case at a December hops conference in Morrisville, N.Y., and a recent Farmer Brewer Conference in Amherst, Mass., the audience consisted of a range of people interested in aspects of growing and malting barley, and using that malt in distilling and brewing.

The day began with a short film put together by GrowNYC, the organization that runs Greenmarket farmers markets and the Greenmarket Regional Grain Project.

The film, "The Local Grain Renaissance in the Northeast," was partially funded by a USDA Rural Development grant and featured various farmers, millers, bakers and other producers working in grains in the region.

Andrea Stanley, who organized the Farmer Brewer Conference in Amherst, appeared in the film and at the conference. She spoke briefly about the three years she and her husband have run Valley Malt, their micromalting business in western Massachusetts. Her talk included an overview of the malting process and the malting industry.

Robert Perry from NOFA-NY spoke about growing and harvesting barley. Perry has been working with Greenmarket on another USDA grant — the OREI (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative) project "Value-Added Grains for Local and Regional Food Systems." Partners on that project also include Cornell, Penn State and groups out in North Dakota.

Perry's job focuses on developing small-scale processing equipment, and putting together a mobile processing unit.

The audience also heard from Tony Van Glad, owner-operator of Wood Homestead & Tundra Brewery in Stamford, N.Y., who described his experiences growing grain and told the story of his son's microbrewery startup.

Samuel Filler of Empire State Development addressed the logistics of licensing under the state's newly enacted Farm Brewery Law.

At the December hops conference, a representative of the New York State Liquor Authority promised the state was establishing a single person or office to consult on all questions related to the law, and it did.

Filler runs the "one stop shop," and after outlining the basics of the licensing procedure, he entertained quite a few questions from the audience. He didn't have all the answers, but he did clarify some points.

A farm owner can have all three farm beverage licenses — farm winery, farm distillery and farm brewery — at once, Filler said, but the farm must apply for each of them separately.

He also clarified the concept of satellites. The license allows operators to have five satellites. These could be five different production facilities, or one brewing spot and four other related enterprises, either retailing, wholesaling or production.

"Empire Brewing helped push through the Farm Brewery Law," Filler said, encouraging people to keep talking to the state about their needs. Communication will help keep the venture and industry moving forward, he said.

Following a lunch that included beer sampling, two panel discussions allowed for more back and forth with the audience.

The first panel focused on infrastructure. Scott Collins from USDA Rural Development



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discussed the value-added grant program. The program funds nonequipment-related startup costs for farmers undertaking agricultural projects. The limits of the grant became apparent as people kept asking about funds to purchase required infrastructure, like hops harvesting equipment, or malting vats.

Marty Matrizzo of FarmHouse Malt discussed the roadblocks he and his wife, Natalie, have encountered while trying to start malting. One of the biggest problems was sourcing seed.

"We spent a year and a half looking for the right kind of barley to grow," he said. "The best place to find it was out West, and it cost more to ship it than to buy it."

Things are improving as people ask regional seed dealers for barley.

Matrizzo also cautioned people about leaping into barley farming without equipment. Hiring or even bartering for use really adds up costs. Another challenge to the startup, he said, is the novelty of the industry.

"It's so new that (the Department of) Ag and Markets doesn't know what to do with us," he said, suggesting that maltsters might have to help the state agency define the situation.

Daniel France, an organic barley grower from Schoharie County, talked about his experiences growing barley for his dairy, which he recently stopped operating.

The next panel focused on the end users of barley: Ryan Demler from the Albany Pump Station, also known as C.H. Evans Brewing; Ken Wortz from KyMar Farm Distillery and Jonathon Post from Bly Hollow Brewery.

"We're producing 80 to 100 cases a month," said Wortz. "And we thought we would do this part time. The demand for local products is unbelievable."

KyMar is in 150 outlets across New York and Massachusetts and expanding into Connecticut and Rhode Island. Wortz said the distillery limits itself to New York state products, his own grains and apples, or those of other farmers. A limit he's trying to solve is floor space, and he sees the malting infrastructure as a problem.


Storage is not a problem right now for Post, who runs a nano brewery under a microbrewery license. A retired English professor from University at Albany-SUNY, Post encouraged more breweries of his size to start. He said using local malt has added 15 to 20 cents to each 22-ounce bottle he produces. The cost is something he can absorb in his price, he said, because he finds the flavors that good ingredients, like the right honey and malt, add to his brews are compelling.

The malting bottleneck came up frequently throughout the day. One farmer compared it to the processing bottleneck meat producers ran into as local production stepped up to meet demand. Congressman Paul Tonko and Albany County Executive Daniel McCoy both said they would help solve the problem.

Carey Center Director Carol Ash said she is eager to solve the problem onsite in Rensselaerville, and would like to see a malting operation and farm brewery on the grounds to help serve the state's needs.

The momentum around using state-grown, and eventually malted, grains is impressive, especially as the farm brewery law comes into effect. From curious home brewers to farmers and restaurateurs seeking a potential "retirement" or career shift, people seemed pleased with what they learned, and ready to keep the energy for barley and malting rolling.

"We came to see about the farm brewery law, and see how this is going to play out for our producers," said Bill Woodring of TAP NY, which produces the largest state beer festival in the country.



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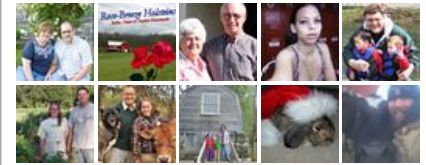
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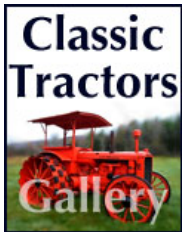
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