

Dairies, breweries make unusual partners

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

Where would breweries be without dairies? It might not be apparent at first glance, but some breweries wouldn't have gotten far without help from the dairy industry.

For example, you might step into a former creamery that has been repurposed as a brewery, as at Klamath Basin Brewery in Klamath Falls.

Or maybe you'll sidle up to a farmhouse beer at Agrarian Brewery near Eugene, which was built in a former dairy barn and uses some repurposed dairy equipment.

Or, you might sip a craft beer that was brewed in a stainless steel former dairy tank, as at Roseburg's Backside Brewery, whose owner K.C. McKillip converted dairy tanks into a mash tun and other tanks used in brewing.

Many of Oregon's early craft breweries, including the Widmer Brothers, Bridgeport and McMenamins used former dairy equipment in their start-up years, according to Pete Dunlop, long-time beer



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Brewers Steve van Rossem, left, and John Crane at Plank Town Brewery in Springfield, Ore., are among many who use dairy equipment for brewing beer. Dairies and breweries help each other in many ways.

historian and writer. The second wave of small craft breweries followed suit in the early 2000s. Alan Sprints, owner of Portland's Hair of the Dog brewery, once used several former milk receivers as fermenters. One of these continues to operate as a mash tun at his popular brewery.

The trend continues today,

and as a result, prices for used equipment are increasing in the beery Northwest.

Andy Walton, owner of Halsey's Lake View Farms, which includes a small dairy operation, said the demand for second-hand stainless steel tanks can make it hard for small dairies to find used equipment.

"There's very little used stuff for the small guy anymore," Walton said. "It's all going to the breweries and wineries."

Walton said small tanks under 500 gallons were once "a dime a dozen." Today, not so. He recently went shopping for a stainless steel tank and found that the bargains had

migrated outside beer country to the Midwest and eastern U.S.

In addition to craft breweries and wineries, small creameries and even small coffee roasters are buying up old dairy equipment.

Walton said he's not complaining, though. As a long-time farmer who direct-markets his produce to the same people drinking craft beer, wine and coffee, he said everyone benefits from the demand for locally made products.

"It's good for all of us to promote this craft community," Walton said. Cheese-makers, dairy owners, brewers and winemakers all benefit from the exchange of information and equipment.

The "I'll-scratch-your-back" attitude extends beyond equipment. For centuries, breweries have been disposing of their spent grain at local ranches and dairies, where it is used as silage supplement. Forwarding the spent grain benefitted the brewers as well: In one year in Oregon, breweries generate 140,000 tons

of spent grain, which would cost \$8.4 million to compost, where applicable, or \$18 million for the landfill charges, said Brian Butenschoen, the Oregon Brewers Guild's executive director.

In 2013, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration proposed new rules that would require additional and expensive packaging and testing to deliver the mash, citing food safety concerns. Brewers and farmers banded together and demanded a review, saying the proposed changes would be so burdensome that the practice would probably discontinue. With help from legislators, the FDA backed down and maintained the status quo.

"One argument that resonated is that FDA is attempting to provide a solution to something that isn't a problem and hasn't been for the thousands of years brewers have been feeding spent grain to animals," said Paul Gatzka, director of the Brewers Association, a national group that promotes craft brewers.

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