



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

AGRARIAN ECONOMY

Popular brewery destination open for business, raising funds for new building

Warmer, sunnier weather is (mostly) here, and for many Lane County residents who like to enjoy a cold one on a hot afternoon, that means it's time to take a trip out to Agrarian Ales.

Stephen Harrell, farm manager for Agrarian Ales Brewing Company, wants people to know that despite a Lane County enforcement action in late February that led to the brewery's sheltered patio area being closed to the public, Agrarian is open for business.

After the winter beer brouhaha, both Agrarian and Lane County say they are working on a legislative fix to change Oregon's land-use laws to allow farm-to-table operations on agricultural lands.

Two Lane County officials came to Agrarian Feb. 23, Harrell says, and reported that the 1940s dairy barn that provided the sheltered patio space was noncompliant with buildings codes and was a fire hazard.

"We always knew this is an agricultural building, and we can't have people inside," Harrell says. But he says,

"We understood it as people as being inside the building" and so designed the patio "so that 99 percent of the time people were not inside the building." He says the county saw it as "if you are under a roof, you are inside."

At the time, the farm-to-table brewery posted about the patio closure on its website and social media, drawing a loud outcry from Agrarian's fans. The county responded with a press release of its own, and the patio remained closed, leading some to believe Agrarian itself was closed to the public.

Since then, Harrell says, the brewery consulted with engineers, contractors and officials and realized that upgrading the original structure at Agrarian would be spendier than building a new reception space.

"For less money we can build new structures and continue to utilize the barn as a processing facility and as our brewery," he tells *Eugene Weekly*.

Agrarian began a Kickstarter campaign that ends May 20 to fundraise for the new public reception/tasting room. The initial goal is to raise \$50,000.

Devon Ashbridge, Lane County public information officer, says Land Management staff worked with Agrarian to help them evaluate their options to meet the required building safety codes and will continue to work with them "whether they decide to address the safety issues in the current building or build a new structure."

Ashbridge adds that, in April, when the Lane County Commission adopted its legislative priorities for the next session, those priorities included "supporting reforms to Oregon's land-use laws that would allow farm-to-table operations on agricultural lands." She says it was also "brought forward during the short session this spring, but there was not enough time to move it through the process."

Back in 2012, Oregon law was changed after King Estate Winery came up against land-use laws that affected its ability to have a restaurant on land zoned for exclusive farm use. Harrell says Agrarian is "actively working with legislators and interested parties" to again reform Oregon's land-use laws.

We are coming upon the season where it's "really nice to be out there," Harrell says. "Agrarian is absolutely open for business." ■

Agrarian Ales is at 31115 Crossroads Lane West. The Kickstarter campaign can be found at agales.com.



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