

Malting barley industry hopes to rebound

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

The U.S. malting barley industry hopes to rebound after drought reduced last year's production by 31%.

Total U.S. barley production was estimated at nearly 118 million bushels, down from nearly 171 million bushels in 2020.

In the Pacific Northwest, Oregon production was down 72%, from 2.2 million bushels to 608,000 bushels.

Washington production was down 58%, from 6.4 million bushels in 2020 to 2.7 million bushels in 2021.

Idaho was down 21%, from 55 million bushels to roughly 47 million bushels.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture doesn't distinguish between malt, feed and food barleys. The majority of malting barley acres are grown under contract.

"We were going into 2021 with low barley stocks, and then we ended 2021 with even lower barley stocks," said Ashley McFarland, vice president and technical director of the American Malting Barley Association.

"Hopefully ... we'll be able to bounce back and get back to normal production volume, but we're really going to have to see what the snow pack is and what our drought monitor says going into the season," she said.

Canada also experienced drought conditions.

"They were actually pulling barley from us at times, so our stocks dwindled even more than in a normal year," McFarland said.



Farmer Dave Fenn harvests winter barley in July 2020 in Lewis County in Washington state.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press

IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, OREGON PRODUCTION WAS DOWN 72%, FROM 2.2 MILLION BUSHELS TO 608,000 BUSHELS.

The association recently released its annual list of recommended barley varieties for growers, intended to provide guidance for which varieties the industry may be purchasing this year.

The list is not a list of approved or certified malting varieties for use by brewers, distillers, food companies or maltsters. There may be many suitable malting barley varieties grown domestically or internationally that are not on the list, according to the organization.

That's particularly relevant this year, McFarland said.

"We had such low production volumes coming off of 2021 because of the drought," she said, adding that it will likely increase the amount of barley the U.S. has to import.

A large maltster might

have to ship in barley from Europe or Australia, McFarland said.

"Just because a maltster is having to use a different variety that's not on our list doesn't mean it's bad," she said.

Over time, the list has become an industry "gospel"

of sorts, McFarland said.

"That's true in terms from a grower sense," she said. "What we don't want is a brewer saying, 'My maltster gave me this barley malt and it's not on the list.' That's not what the list is intended for."

New to the list this year are the varieties ABI Cardinal and Regina.

ABI Cardinal is bred by Anheuser-Busch at Global Barley Research in Fort Collins, Colorado.

It represents a shift from Anheuser-Busch's six-row barleys to breeding two-row

barleys, McFarland said.

The barley heads differ, from two rows of grain compared to six rows of grain.

Six-row barleys have dominated larger, adjunct brewers for a long time, based on the profile the barley provides, McFarland said.

"There's also certainly some yield enhancement with a six-row barley, but maybe you're not getting as plump a kernel," she said.

Two-row barleys are more in favor for all-malt and craft brewers, but breeding has evolved to perform just as well, increasing interest from larger brewers.

Market preferences between two-row barley and six-row barley can depend on how the variety is used, growing area and its genetic makeup, McFarland said.

Regina is a German-bred winter variety that is grown in Ohio and surrounding states.

The variety Conlon was removed because it was not used often, McFarland said.

"If our members are not seeing value in a variety, they certainly don't want to be recommending to farmers to be growing that," McFarland said. "We just want to make sure that list is most reflecting what they're wanting to buy."

Some varieties are used in large quantities and many others are used only in niche markets. Producers are encouraged to contact their local elevator, grain handler or processor to gauge market demand for any variety grown in their region prior to seeding.

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