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Asahi Beverages overhauls supply chain to source barley direct from Aussie farmers

Some of Australia's most-loved beers will be brewed using barley purchased directly from Aussie farmers for the first time in decades, with the first batch of new beers to roll off the lines next month.

The new supply chain will give Asahi Beverages, which owns Carlton & United Breweries, clear oversight of the barley growing process to ensure only the best barley is used to brew beers such as Victoria Bitter, Carlton Draught, Great Northern and Pure Blonde.

Under the new deal, barley purchased direct from farmers will travel from farms to our breweries in Yatala, Queensland or Abbotsford, Victoria, before being shipped across Australia as beer.

The new deal also showcases Australian farmers' commitment to producing high quality and sustainably grown barley.

More than 30 Victorian farmers in the barley-growing hubs of the Wimmera and the Mallee have been engaged, with their 30,000 tonnes of barley sent to the Abbotsford Brewery once it has been malted.

And seven farmers from southern NSW will supply 40,000 tonnes of barley to Asahi's Yatala Brewery in Queensland once it has been malted. Northern NSW growers are expected to join the scheme before this year's harvest. The first beers using the directly-purchased barley will be brewed at both Abbotsford and Yatala in April.

The new supply chain means more than 90% of Asahi Beverages' barley is purchased direct from farmers in line with our quality and sustainability requirements, with the program set to then expand to Asahi Beverages' smaller breweries including Cascade in Hobart.

Asahi Beverages' Group Chief Brewer Jaideep Chandrasekharan said: "Barley malt is the heart and soul of beer and has a defining influence on the taste, colour, aroma and foam. Australian malting barley is of the highest quality and sourcing it direct from farmers is an important change for our national operations and also the dozens of farmers we'll purchase from.

"Under the old model the grains we purchased generally weren't segregated but this program allows us to track the provenance of barley used to brew our major beers and gives us direct relationships with more farmers.

"Farmers will grow barley in accordance with our strict quality program, we'll monitor quality parameters such as protein levels and grain size, and we'll link on-farm practices to beer quality. We will also track water use and other agricultural inputs to ensure our barley helps us achieve our sustainability targets.

"Until recently, the expertise to develop and maintain an intricate program like this at scale didn't exist in Australia but we're now working with supply chain managers Origin Trail and Pure Grain to bring it to life."

Barley is one of beer's four key ingredients along with hops, yeast and water. Asahi Beverages, which developed the new direct sourcing program after it purchased CUB last year, buys more than 70,000 tonnes of it annually before it's turned into malt ready for use in brewing.

Farmer John Bennett, whose barley farm in Victoria's West Wimmera is now supplying Asahi Beverages direct, said: "The new program connects our farm directly with Asahi Beverages. This relationship gives us a better understanding of their stringent quality parameters and ensures we provide the highest-quality barley for their brewing process. Buying barley direct not only benefits farmers, but the communities we live in too."

Grain Producers Australia Chairman Andrew Weidemann AM said: "Barley farmers have faced many challenges in recent years so it's fantastic to see a program like this launch. With Asahi Beverages' knowledge and experience, the program will help ensure crops are grown sustainably and that farmers can grow new varieties that can open up more international markets for them, which is particularly timely. Aussie farmers have always been proud to grow the produce that goes into Australia's iconic beers but this direct connection makes this even better. Cheers to Asahi Beverages for launching it."

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Australian malting barley

More than 1 million tonnes of malting barley are produced by Australian farmers each year for brewing in Australia and overseas. Barley is one of Australia's top crops.

Australia is world-renowned for producing high quality malting barley. In Australia, barley is second in crop size only to wheat, covering almost 4 million hectares sweeping from central and southern Queensland, throughout north to south mid-western NSW, northern and western Victoria, north to south central Tasmania, south-east and south-central SA and south-western WA.

Australian and overseas beer lovers have much to be grateful for, due to the contribution of Australian farmers to their beers.