Sustainable Malting Barley and Climate Change

Many people enjoy good beer. In the U.S., brewing is a $351 billion industry that provides 2.2 million jobs. Of this total, the craft brewing industry contributed $76.2 billion and more than 500,000 jobs. Climate change puts this pleasure and positive economic impact in jeopardy.

Authors of a recent article in *Crop Science* address the goal of ensuring the sustainability of producing malting barley (the base of beer) in the face of climate change. The Brewers Association, which represents small and independent craft brewers, challenged the Oregon State University Barley Project to engage in a thought exercise on the feasibility of breeding perennial malting barley. All barley varieties currently used for malting and brewing are annuals. Perennial crops have the potential to provide a range of ecosystem services, and there is impressive progress in the development of perennial forms of cereal crops—notably intermediate wheatgrass.

Perennial malting barley, while an attractive proposition, would require sustained investment and commitment at levels that are difficult to envision in the current funding climate. A more cost-effective, short-term, solution is to support more breeding and management research directed at increasing the sustainability of annual malting barley production.


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