

NORDIC RAW MATERIALS FOR NORDIC BEER

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Our beer markets in the Nordic countries are dominated by lager beers of excellent quality. And these lagers are supplemented by a myriad of other beer styles offered not only by the smaller craft oriented breweries, but also by many of the bigger breweries. But if we are very objective and honest, the beers brewed at our breweries are not to a great extent unique. They could, and they often are, also be brewed by other breweries from most of the other continents. There are, with precious few exceptions, no beers brewed in our region that are indigenous to this region.



For a number of years, it has been my conviction that the real opportunities for long-term success of the craft segments of the brewing industry in our region is to differentiate themselves from other brewing cultures around the world by brewing unique, indigenous Nordic beers.

Is this very ambitious dream of creating our entirely own category of Nordic beer even possible, and, if it is, what will it take? It will certainly, however simple it may sound, be a very long and challenging process. But it is still so potentially important that I have decided to try to outline and inspire this process with a series of articles in the coming issues of the SBR. And as there can be no doubt that, in order for such a future Nordic beer category to be truly good, unique and indigenous – meaning only possible to brew with genuine Nordic raw materials – it is obviously necessary that these genuine Nordic raw materials will be made available to the brewers. Thus, I have chosen to start the series of articles on the Nordic beer with this editorial on the status of the growing and use of indigenous Nordic raw materials for brewing, asking some of the most knowledgeable and deeply involved people in the industry to comment on it.

In my view, we have as yet seen very little happening on the front of developing and marketing such new and different indigenous raw materials. With the risk of me overlooking projects of this nature that I haven't heard about in the other Nordic countries, I can list the few that I do know of: 'The Nordic Malthouse Project' (2007-2009) that was sponsored by the Nordic Council, but was only a 'desk project' producing a report outlining the opportunities and challenges involved with establishing small 'specialty maltings' in the Nordic region processing local and malting barleys, different from the mainstream lager malts. Per Kølster of Per Kølster Malt and Beer (previously Fuglebjerggaard), who participated in the aforementioned project, decided back in 2009 to build a micro malting (ca. 1 ton batch size) to process both his own locally grown 'alternative' malting barleys, and some from other growers. Per has promised me a series of articles for

the SBR on this project, and I hope to be able to publish the first one soon. The Nils Oscar Brewery in Tärnö, Sweden, has a 10 ton mini malting where they process both standard lager malts, but also specialty cereals like naked oats grown on their own estate. Kasper Vorting at the Bøgedal farmhouse brewery in Jutland, Denmark, as well as Herslev Bryggeri on Sealand, Denmark, both grow their own malting barley, but do not have the capability to malt it themselves. At Carlsberg, a project involving brewing a 'Limited Edition' beer at the Jacobsen Brewhouse, also with an alternative malting barley grown under the auspices of the Carlsberg Research Centre has just been launched with brewing in early August – another project that will be featured in a later article by Master Brewer Finn Lok at CRC. As far as hops go, the development is even further behind, probably because all major scale commercial hop growing was discontinued in the Nordic region many decades ago. There's still only an almost negligible activity at the Carlsberg Research Centre and by Per Kølster involving the Winge clones developed and cultivated half a century ago by professor and director at the CRC, Øjvind Winge. In Sweden, the only hop growing project I know of takes place at Eslöv in the Skåne region, where a limited crop of hops is harvested every year by volunteers and the hops are used mainly for home brewing. I'm not aware of any such projects in either Norway, Finland or the Baltic states.

How do we accelerate the development of a steady and ample supply of alternative brewing raw materials that are unique to our region? Those that have the primary interest in this, the brewers at the many breweries, do not themselves have the time, money, knowledge, or maybe even the official authority, to initiate projects of the range and magnitude that are necessary. Starting something as difficult and resource demanding as the development of new raw materials from scratch is no minor task. To me, there is no doubt that this requires getting a commitment from some of the 'heavyweights' like the EU, the Nordic Council and/or the individual governments and municipalities. From here the economic funding as well as help to establish effective project organisations will have to

be sourced. But before such support can be achieved, formal project descriptions and applications have to be drawn up and submitted, and again the end users will need help and support to produce these. Here, another group of people from what I call the 'supply chain' for the Nordic beer ambition will need to come into play, namely the scientific/academic system – private, semi private as well as public, who holds the basic knowledge about the substance of the biology and agronomy involved as well as of operating in the jungle of publicly funded projects. It is my belief and hope that these people will be highly motivated to jump into a project like the 'Nordic Raw Materials for Nordic Beer'. Simply because that is the way they get most of the funding for their institutions in the first place. And secondly because I am sure that they will find the idea very interesting and highly challenging.

The abovementioned 'supply chain' consists, as I see it, of the following: The political system from the EU to the local municipalities creating the framework and the financing for the development work, the scientific/academic system as described above, commercial plant breeders, the growers of the commercial crops – cereals for malting or raw use in brewing, hops, growers of other 'non-traditional' ingredients that may find use in the beers – the processors – maltsters, hop processors, fruit growers, etc., and finally the end users – the brewers.

How and when these projects get going, I don't know, but my promise to you, dear reader of the SBR, is that I'll personally put my energy – using the pages of the SBR and in many other ways, too – into the attempt to get something going and to keeping you informed of the progress.

Please remember that we at the SBR very strongly encourage you to respond to anything you wish to comment on in the magazine, but obviously particularly to the editorial and the debate columns. Please forward your comments to me.

Enjoy your reading,
Anders Kissmeyer, technical editor