

FOLLOWING THE

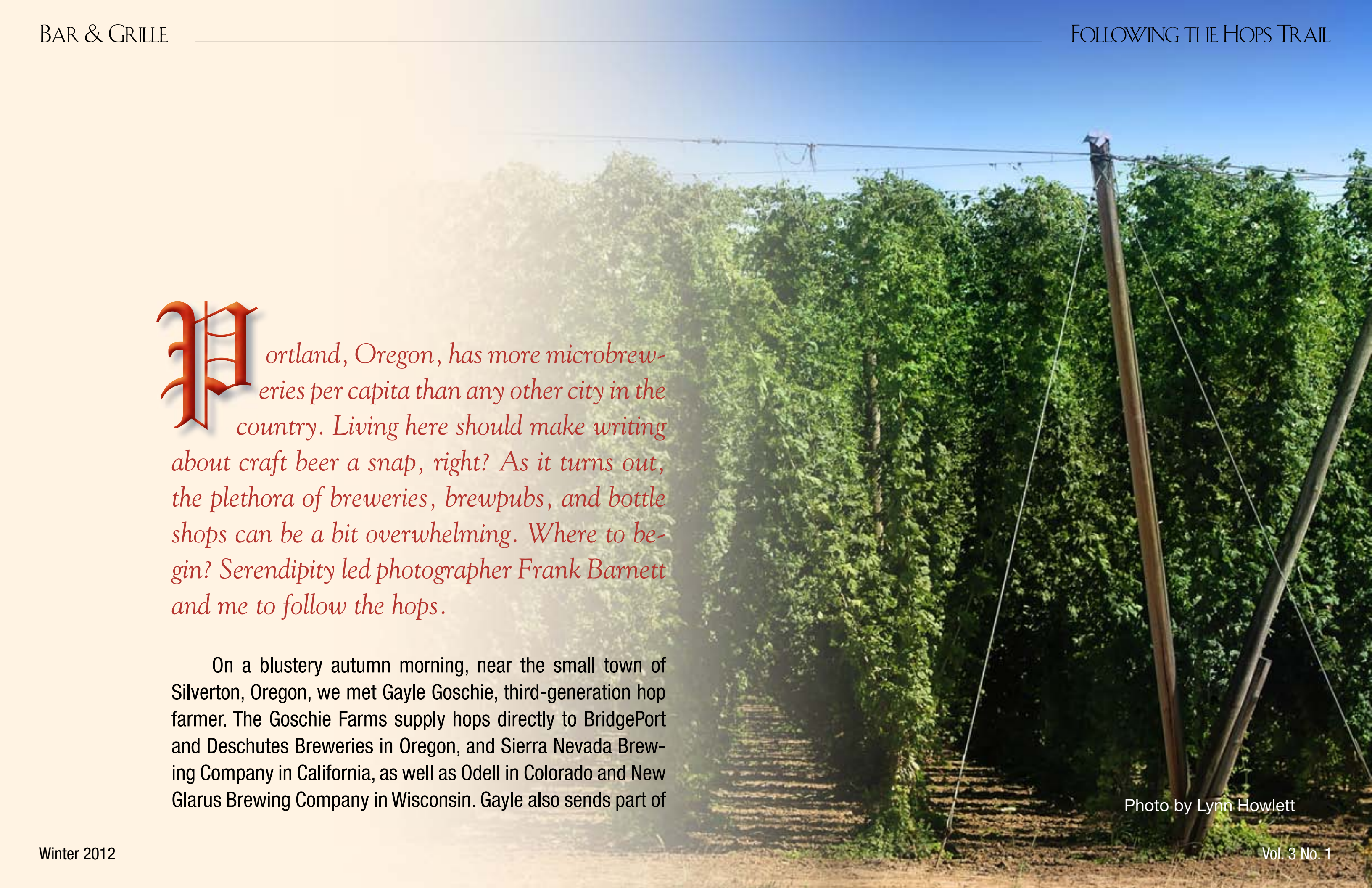
Hops Trail



Discovering Craft Brews
from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine

Story by Mart McCann
Photography by Frank Barnett

Following the Hops Trail is a two-part series concluding in the spring issue of *The Contemporary Sportsman*. Photographed by Frank Barnett, who has made food and specialty beverages his focus for over a decade, and journalist Mart McCann, whose work has also appeared in this publication, the journey begins at the Goschie Hops Farm near Portland, Oregon, and ends at Allagash Brewing Company in Portland, Maine.



Hortland, Oregon, has more microbreweries per capita than any other city in the country. Living here should make writing about craft beer a snap, right? As it turns out, the plethora of breweries, brewpubs, and bottle shops can be a bit overwhelming. Where to begin? Serendipity led photographer Frank Barnett and me to follow the hops.

On a blustery autumn morning, near the small town of Silverton, Oregon, we met Gayle Goschie, third-generation hop farmer. The Goschie Farms supply hops directly to BridgePort and Deschutes Breweries in Oregon, and Sierra Nevada Brewing Company in California, as well as Odell in Colorado and New Glarus Brewing Company in Wisconsin. Gayle also sends part of

Photo by Lynn Howlett



her hop harvest to Indie Hops, the only company in Oregon that converts fresh hops into pellets for craft brewers.

When we sat down at the conference table at Goschie Farms, Gayle had just returned from Haiti, where she built homes with Habitat for Humanity. “Hops have traditionally been traded through a third party, but my father started selling directly to Anheuser-Busch almost 35 years ago.” The relationship with AB, as it is called by nearly everyone in the business, changed dramatically in 2008 when the brewing giant was sold to InBev, an international brewing concern headquartered in Belgium that now has nearly 25% of the global market share.

One of the factors that prompted InBev to end AB’s direct relationship with Goschie Farms was the need for consistency in its products. As Gayle related, “even before the takeover, they had taken one step towards efficiency, which was to pelletize the cone. The pelleting of a hop cone does a couple of things: it helps to preserve the natural product, and it provides the brewer with much more consistency. Imagine taking 200-lb. bales of hops from Goschie Farms in Oregon, a hop farm in Yakima, Washington, and a dozen other sources, and expecting to be able to make Budweiser that tastes the same in every brewery where it is made.”

If this sounds like a bad thing, think again.

After Prohibition and decades of consolidation in the beer-brewing business, American industrial brewers produced a fairly uniform, mild-tasting lager. At the end of the 1970s, there were only 44 brewing companies in the United States, and industry

experts expected that number to dwindle to five. Many beer drinkers turned to homebrewing to satisfy their desire for something more distinctive. They took their inspiration from Britain, Germany, and Belgium, where the centuries-old craft of artisan brewing had flourished, uninterrupted by the Volstead Act.

“For many years, craft brewers were able to get their aroma hops essentially from what fell off the table at Anheuser-Busch and other industrial brewers,” Jim Solberg, CEO of Indie Hops, told us. “The industrial brewers now put less emphasis on aroma hops, which add aroma and flavor, and more emphasis on the bittering hops, which counter the sweetness of the malt. At the same time, the craft industry had grown dramatically to the point where those table scraps just weren’t enough. There was a tremendous shortage there, and the burgeoning industry is still trying to correct itself.”

Gayle Goschie agrees, “It’s been really fortunate for us, a relatively small farm, to be able to shift a huge percentage of our business from this wonderful relationship that we had with AB, a family-owned company, to multiple craft brewers.”

Gayle’s enthusiasm for all things craft-brew-related is almost palpable. Last summer she hosted dinner on the farm for 200 beer-bloggers “from all over the country. Frankly, there are a lot of brewers who have never been to a hop farm, and an even smaller percentage of bloggers.”

As part of that memorable visit, she prepared “hop brownies. We gained a few pounds preparing them because we had to keep tweaking the recipe until we got it right.”



Above: Jim Solberg, CEO of Indie Hops, at its hops pellet production facility in Hubbard, Oregon.



Vintage photographs of hop harvesting, hop kilns, and delivery wagons had been collected by Gayle's mother, Vernice, a spirited octogenarian who graciously shared anecdotes with us as we turned the pages of her photo album. Gayle described early picking by hand. "Someone would yell 'wire down,' and they would lower the wire to be able to pick from the hop vine right into the basket." Hop vines are trained to grow up a string or wire that is generally about 18 feet tall. And they are all trained to grow clockwise. "You have to train them one way or they unravel and fall down," advised Vernice.

The hop harvest occurs within a short period of time, a time of round-the-clock intensity. "We picked 24 hours a day, two 12-hour shifts," Vernice recalled. Depending on the variety of hop, the optimal picking window might be as few as five days, so many growers plant several varieties to stagger the harvest. Today, Goschie Farms grow about a dozen varieties.

While economies of scale usually drive larger brewers to use hop pellets, Sierra Nevada Brewing Company is "one



of the few breweries—Deschutes is another—that still uses the whole dried hop cone that comes off the farm,” Gayle informed us.

Although microbreweries and regional breweries are defined by production volume, “craft brewery” is more difficult to nail down. Asked if there was some point at which a brewer could no longer be considered a craft brewer, Gayle responded, “The largest craft brewer in the United States is Samuel Adams, the Boston Beer Company. Last summer, Jim Koch (the owner) visited our farm during harvest, and I can tell you that, for all the millions of barrels of beer that company makes, they are still craft brewers. To me, what differentiates a craft brewer from a major industrial brewer is their attention to detail in every product. They are truly artisans at brewing beer. The same is true of Sierra Nevada; Ken Grossman, that brewery’s founder, is still extremely hands-on with the beers being made there.”

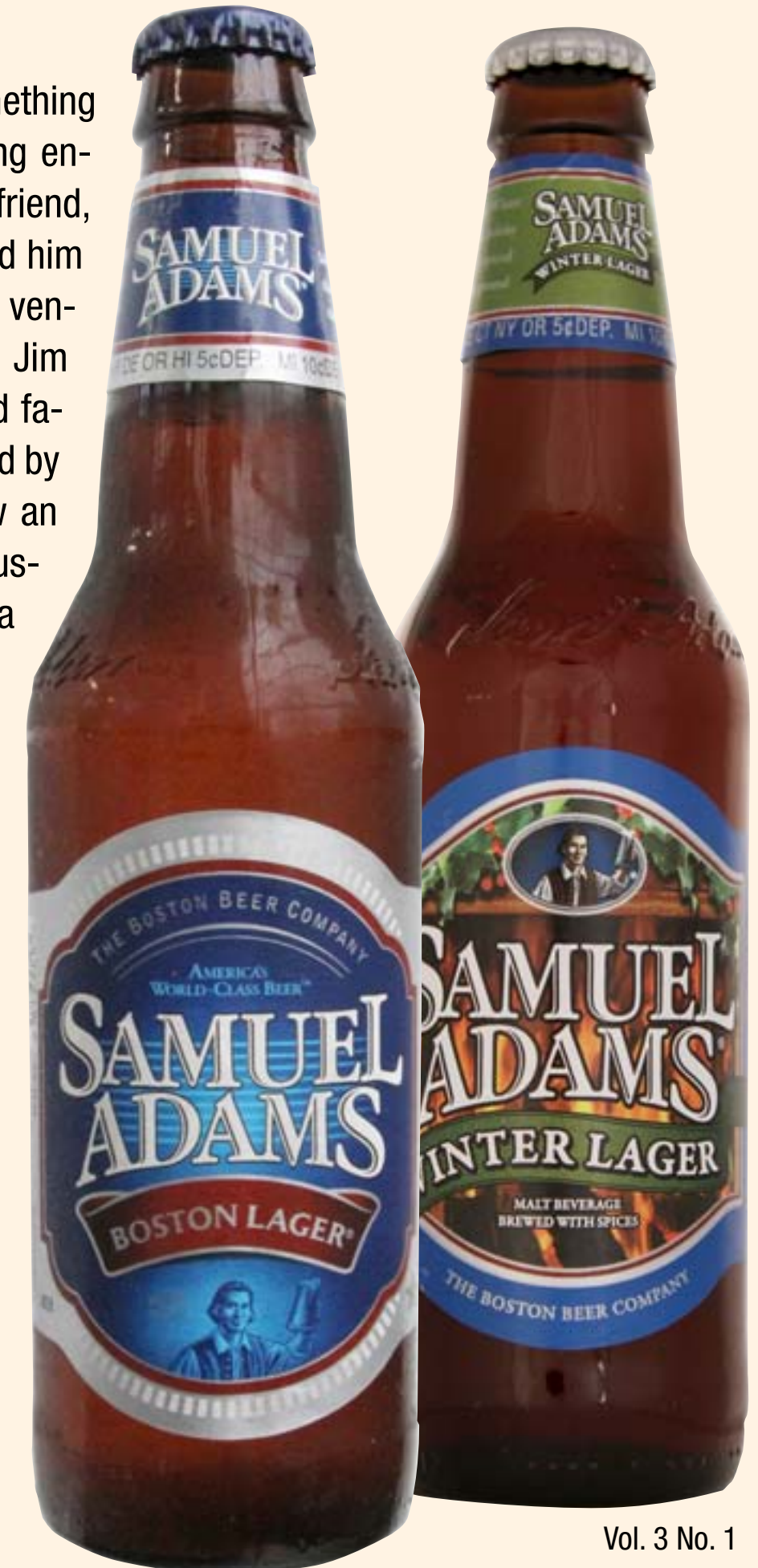
When we mentioned to Gayle that we were having lunch with Jim Solberg of Indie Hops at the Glockenspiel restaurant in nearby Mt. Angel (population 3,500) she made an instant connection, “Joe Sears and his wife Adele were great friends of my Mom and Dad. Their daughter, Mary Grant, runs the Glockenspiel, and their son Paul took over the hops operation.”


Promising to give their regards to Mary, if we had the chance to meet her, we left Gayle and Vernice Goschie and headed down the Hops Trail for the quaint Bavarian-themed town of Mt. Angel.

Jim Solberg, CEO of Indie Hops, is a 40-something former

Nike executive with a 30-something countenance and 20-something enthusiasm. When his childhood friend, Roger Worthington, approached him about starting a new business venture, the timing was perfect. Jim was already homebrewing and familiar with the challenges faced by small, craft brewers. “We saw an opportunity in that the hops industry had migrated to the Yakima Valley.” Central Washington’s Yakima Valley, on the east side of the Cascade mountain range is warmer and drier than Oregon’s Willamette Valley, and has a slightly longer growing season. Logically, economies of scale would dictate that hop production on an industrial level would favor that locale.

On the other hand, the Willamette Valley, where hops have been grown for well over 100 years, presented Indie Hops with unique opportunities





in the craft brew market. One of the first actions taken by the nascent company was a donation of \$1 million to Oregon State University for research and development of better hops. Worthington, made wealthy by his law practice, which won settlements of over \$1 billion for victims of asbestos exposure, was ready to produce a product that made people happy. In his biography on the Indie Hops website, Roger writes, “Since 1988, I’ve been representing workers poisoned by asbestos. Nobody, except the Devil, loves asbestos. On the other hand, everyone it seems, including the Devil, loves hops.” Both he and Solberg “grew up in Corvallis, and didn’t go to Oregon State, but we love the Beavers and have very fond memories of that university town,” recalled Solberg.

Sometimes it takes as long as 10 years to develop a new hop and get it certified, so Jim and Roger decided to resurrect some varieties that had been overlooked by industrial brewers. One variety they chose to revive was a hop called Columbia. Along with a hop called Willamette, Anheuser-Busch was considering Columbia to replace what they called Oregon Fuggle in Budweiser and some of their other beers. AB decided to use Willamette hops, and the trial acreage of Columbia was destroyed.

Now the story really gets interesting—Goschie Farms had planted the trial acreage, and Gayle discovered that a few plants had survived the destruction of the test field. She propagated from the survivors and had her first harvest in 2011, but when the hops came off the ground, she and Jim Solberg realized they had stumbled onto something extraordinary. As he described,

“it wasn’t anywhere near the aroma of a Fuggle hop. Chemical analysis confirmed that this hop was clearly not Columbia but something else that had gotten into those hills. We don’t know what; we just know that it doesn’t exist already as a commercial hop. As a placeholder we are calling it Meridian.” And Meridian, in Jim’s words, is “stunning. Dan Carey, brewmaster at New Glarus Brewing Company, latched onto it as soon as he smelled it. He simply raved, ‘how much of that do you have? I want it all!’ I know they brewed with it in November; I can’t wait to see what he’s done with it.” Gayle Goschie, whose farm is on Meridian Road in Silverton, is no doubt curious, as well.

The Indie Hops facility, located on Meridian Road in Hubbard, Oregon, was built specifically for processing hops for the craft industry. Now you know where the name Meridian came from. After lunch, we drove over to see “the mill.” In the course of developing a relationship with the Coleman family, another century-old hop grower with an alluvial farm near Independence, Indie Hops was offered a portion of Coleman’s nursery stock grading facility, a huge insulated metal building, to lease as a mill. When we arrived, the day’s pellet production had been finished, and the Palafox brothers, “certified hop hands” Sergio and Filemón, were lining cardboard boxes with foil bags.

Jim Solberg described the symbiotic relationship with the Coleman Farms. “The Coleman family has a highly diversified agricultural operation here, but hops are really the family heritage. They use the freezer to store bare root trees during the spring, but then we pressure wash it and use it for cold storage

after the hop harvest,” which usually takes place in August and September.

In short, hop pellets are made by breaking up the 200-lb. bales of dried hops into small particles and forcing them through a rotating die whose holes are about one quarter of an inch in diameter. Temperatures are checked going into the pellet mill, coming out of the pellet mill, and going into the cooler to minimize any potential damage to the hop material. The other enemy of hop components is oxygen, and Indie Hops monitors that closely, staying well below the industry standard of 2% residual oxygen.

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Hops evaluation is a lot like wine tasting and coffee bean cupping. Solberg’s company sends out “brewers’ cuts,” samples for brewers to examine. Mill Supervisor Eric Peterson uses an electric chain saw to cut a slab of compressed hops from the whole bale, and then employs an ordinary bread knife to make neat four-inch squares about one inch thick. Sometimes Jim hosts evaluations with brewers at the mill. “We might have 18 to 20 brewers’ cuts out, and then go through them, starting with the more mild varieties and moving to the more pungent ones. Brewers like to see the intact product, right out of the bale, be-



Jim Solberg claims an experienced brewer can imagine the beer just by smelling the hops.



cause they get to take a look at cone structure. We've cut right through the cones so you can see their structure and color. Once you've had some experience, you know what to look for. The brewer will open up the package and rub the hops between his hands. You do this to cause friction, break up the lupulin glands, and volatilize the essential oils. You get it all smashed up like that, and then you stick your nose in it!" thrusting his face into the hops to demonstrate. "An experienced brewer can imagine a beer just by smelling the hops."

In the next issue, we move from the field and the processing plant to Oregon State University's Fermentation Science Program and finally to the brewery. Stay tuned—you'll want to learn about all the *great* brews out there waiting for you to give them a taste. 



Brewers, Fish, and Sportsmen Alike Need Quality Water

The preservation of salmon habitat is of great concern in the Pacific Northwest. Goschie Farms was one of the first hop growers to be certified "Salmon Safe." Gayle Goschie explained, "I feel really proud that, not only is Goschie Farms now Salmon Safe, but that other farms have joined the movement, too. It took brewers to recognize that we were making a difference, one they wanted to be able to share with their consumers. Deschutes was the first brewery to recognize Salmon Safe certification and to actually print it on the labels of their beer." Consumers who buy Salmon Safe brews are "supporting healthy agricultural practices that help keep our rivers clean enough for native salmon to spawn and thrive," according to the website www.salmonsafe.org.

