



The Locale brew crew at Knutzen Farms, from left: Charles and Rose Ann Finkel (founders of The Pike Brewing Co.), Steve Jones from WSU's Bread Lab, Wayne Carpenter from Skagit Valley Malting, Dan Gunderson and Konnie McCutchin from Knutzen Farms (which grows the malt for Skagit Valley) and Drew Gillespie vice president of The Pike Brewing Co.

Single Malt Varietal

Kendall Jones raises a glass to the new, micro-local terroir of Washington beer

THE TERMS "SMALL" and "local" are pervasive in conversations about the virtues of craft beer, but until recently, no craft beer was entirely small or local. It burns the ears of craft beer aficionados to hear that the primary ingredient in the suds they love was developed at the behest of the mega breweries they despise, but in reality, the malted barley that serves as the backbone of all craft beer is the same stuff used by the largest breweries on earth.

But now, Skagit Valley Malting in Mount Vernon is working in conjunction with Washington State University's Bread Lab to provide a truly small and local alternative, doing something that makes craft brewers giddy: producing small-batch, locally grown malted barley.

To produce this key ingredient in beer, farmers grow barley and sell it to companies referred to as "malting houses," where it is transformed into malted barley. Most barley is grown on huge farms in Montana, Idaho and the Dakotas, and processed by large, out-of-state malting houses, but Skagit Valley Malting is sourcing its barley from smaller, local farms and producing malted barley on a vastly smaller scale.

The varieties of barley sourced by Skagit Valley Malting are uncommon and interesting, adjectives that kindle the imagination of craft brewers. Now, thanks to The Pike Brewing Company and at least one other local brewery, you can taste the fruits of Skagit Valley Malting's labor.

"We know that craft beer drinkers are passionate about drinking locally," says Art Dixon, lead brewer at The Pike Brewing Company in Seattle. "As brewers, we're

excited to introduce them to all new flavors with these locally grown malts."

Why is this such a big deal? Prohibition severely impacted America's barley farmers and malting houses, and when it was repealed in 1933, the emergence of America's macro breweries dictated what kind of barley was grown and produced. The needs and whims of the modern craft beer industry, and a broader spectrum of flavor options, were never part of the plan.

Last June, Pike Brewing released Locale Skagit Valley Alba pale ale, which many experts called Washington's first true varietal beer: hops from Yakima, grains from Skagit and Whitman counties, and Pike Brewing's own yeast. This was the first of the Pike Locale series of beers showcasing locally grown malted barley from Skagit Valley Malting. A second version of Skagit Valley Alba pale ale was released in August.

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Locally grown barley, such as Alba from Skagit Valley Malting, takes craft brewing to new heights and flavors



"Craft brewers have done an admirable job brewing delicious beers with a very limited palette of malts," says Charles Finkel, founder and president of The Pike Brewing Company. "Pike Locale ushers in a new chapter with these locally grown, varietal malts that will introduce beer drinkers to new flavors."

There are many types of barley and many uses for it (livestock feed, breads, soups and so on), but until recently only a few varieties were transformed into malted barley for use in beer. This particular variety of barley earned the name Alba because of the bright golden appearance of the crop at maturity—*alba* is the Italian word for dawn.

Alba was among the first malted barleys produced by Skagit Valley Malting, but there are others, each providing its own, uncommon character. For example, Skagit's "Purple Egyptian" barley has ignited

a firestorm of anticipation among craft brewers, not only because of its zesty fruit character, but also because it is an ancient grain that originated in the headwaters of the Nile River and was revived by scientists and grain historians at Seattle Pacific University. Craft brewers, and craft beer drinkers, love that kind of geeky stuff.

Other breweries are following Pike's lead. Brickyard Brewing, Foggy Noggin Brewing, Fremont Brewing and Naked City Brewing are among the local breweries currently producing beers brewed with malted barley from Skagit Valley Malting, and most are due out this fall. Flyers Brewery in Oak Harbor is now using malted barley from Skagit Valley Malting in all of its beers, although it makes up only a portion of the malt used in each recipe.

Still, craft beer fans can now sleep soundly knowing that at least some of the brews they embrace are truly small and local.



PIKE LOCALE SKAGIT VALLEY ALBA PALE ALE (\$9.99 FOR 22-OUNCE BOTTLE)

A white, lacy head sits atop a perfectly poured pint of this sparkling, bright golden beer, awakening memories of grandma's kitchen and freshly baked white bread, toasted and slathered with honey. Perfectly balanced with a modest, fruity hop bitterness, the Alba malt is the star of this show, providing a crisp, clean flavor that is slightly sweet but never cloying, robust but light and

refreshing. This 5.5 percent alcohol by volume beer is available while supplies last at bottle shops and grocery stores in 22-ounce bottles, and on tap at Pike Brewing's pub and at better beer bars.