



MALT IT LOCAL

Linda Carr discovers a North Geelong business processing barley to supply malt to breweries – including Little Creatures.
Photography by Jeffrey Richardson



There's something special for regional communities when a product supply line connects local growers to local processors through to local customers. That feeling of pride and connectedness can be more intense when the end product is one which is raising the region's profile as a gourmet location. So it is with locally-grown barley being malted here to be used by craft breweries in Geelong and the Surf Coast.

One of the companies directly in the middle of this strong, personal linkage is the Australian malt producer Barrett Burston Malting, who have been in the industry for more than 150 years. Located in North Geelong, the company buys Victorian-grown barley to process into malt which is then supplied to the specifications of local

craft breweries. Some customers will only use Victorian malt as firm company policy. "Barley for malt is a top earning crop for the farmers," says Plant Manager, Paul Carter. "They'll harvest a lot, knowing that only a portion of their crop is actually going to meet the premium standard, so we have a close relationship with them, some going back decades."

"Their farms are across the state, from as local as Little River down the road, right out to the west at Rupanyup. On average we receive about 325 tons a day in truck deliveries, each delivery has to meet the standards set by Grain Trade Australia. That's the first quality check."

There are many different types of malt and each one brings a different flavour and mouthfeel to the beer. A pale malt

for example provides a lighter taste while the much darker malts give a stronger flavour and colour. Various malts can also be blended to make a unique taste profile, so it is important to know the customer's approach to their product and the aspirations they have.

"Brewing is always evolving and brewers are constantly looking for consistency, quality and reliability in their malt," explains Barrett Burston Malting's Marketing Manager, Liam Amani. "In the period following Covid-19 we saw a growing need in the market for a locally-produced, low-colour lager malt made from Australian barley."

"That led to the development of Australian Extra Pale Malt, which we launched with a campaign called Paddock to Pint, highlighting the journey from barley paddock to beer. Our role is to support new ideas and styles with high-quality malt – predominantly barley – but also from other local grains such as wheat."

Although the processing plant does have a small batch roaster for the darker malt,



Photograph supplied by Barrett Burston Malting



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its biggest processing volume is through the three-step process of steeping in water, germination and finally kilning.

"Because it's such a long cycle – approximately a week – we have in-process testing, all through the plant, with certain parameters that we're looking at," adds Paul.

The process uses large volumes of water and the company has made inroads into recycling and sustainability efforts. On site there is a waste-water treatment plant with a reverse osmosis filtration system to recycle 50 per cent of total production water.

Many of the company's customers are household names. One popular local brewery, Little Creatures, has been sourcing local malt since commencing Geelong operations in 2013.

"All our pale malt comes from Barrett Burston," says Little Creatures' Brewing Leader Dennis Stewart. "They're making great malt that makes great beer – it impacts the flavour and the body. It's just a real nice story and a great connection to Victoria by making sure the vast majority of our malt is all Victorian."

"Because they're 10 minutes down the road, the relationship we have with the Maltster is quite unique. We're able to know what barley varieties are coming in-and-out of fashion as they become approved





to be a malting variety. It's quite a thing to become a malting variety, quite a challenge for the farmer."

We chat further in the brewery's sunny courtyard, watching locals drift in after work.

"The interesting thing here at Little Creatures Geelong is that we make a beer called Furphy," adds Dennis. "It was born and bred here at Little Creatures, which is really exciting. It uses 100 per cent Victorian grain and hops."

The malt goes full circle as Little Creatures' own waste management processes return spent malt back to farms for cattle feed.

Keeping it local can have many benefits in addition to obvious job creation. It adds to community identity and a trusting environment that promotes innovation. In regional environments where relationships are crucial, it is the dedication of staff and management that ensures the success of a strong company producing excellent product.

Back at Barrett Burston, Paul explains "I believe it's a great place to work. I'm reasonably new but across the site here we have great staff. I've just had two guys tick over 30 years, another one coming up to 40 years. They take a lot of pride in what they do. And that comes out in the end product."

For locals wanting to see how brewing is done, tours are available at Brewery Tours Geelong – Little Creatures.

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