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## FOR QUALITY, MIDWEST BREWERS CHOOSE GORST VALLEY HOPS

“Made with the finest quality ingredients.”

The slogan has become almost ubiquitous on the labels of products ranging from chocolate to beer.

It’s no surprise that food and beverage manufacturers want to be known for their quality, says beer brewer Bo B elanger. “I want to be able to say the same thing,” he says. “And the only way for me to survive is to pay attention to the way I can differentiate myself. I truly believe that things of quality and things that are grown locally put a signature on my beer.”

Since 2004, B elanger has owned South Shore Brewery in Ashland, Wisconsin. The brewery opened back in 1995, with B elanger as its brewmaster, a role he still fills today.

The beer he brews marries his artistic side with both science and history. “The styles of beer we drink today are based on the regions where they were developed,” says B elanger. “We brew a nutbrown ale. That style of beer is classic—it’s a 400-year-old beer.”

Yet, he says, his nutbrown ale is distinct because it draws on the flavors—water, grains, hops—of *his* region. “I grow my own grain—and if the hops we use can’t be grown in Ashland County, I’m going to know the grower and I’m going to know the processor,” he says.

B elanger purchases hops from Mazomanie, Wisconsin-based Gorst Valley Hops, a company committed to raising awareness among brewers, hops growers and the public of the characteristics and importance of high-quality hops. Through a unique charter grower program that centers around using science and education for growing the highest-quality hops, Gorst Valley Hops provides 13 varieties of pelletized or leaf-variety hops to several craft brewers throughout the Midwest.

In late December, South Shore debuted its Wisconsin Pale Ale, a light copper-colored beer that has a malt character built to hold up to high hop levels. The beer features exclusively Nugget and Cascade hops from Gorst Valley Hops and base malt grown in Ashland and Bayfield Counties.

B elanger, who also uses Gorst Valley Hops in beer he brews for a Duluth, Minnesota, bar and comedy club, says he purchases hops from Gorst Valley Hops in part because Gorst Valley experts analyze their hops according to strict American Society

for Brewing Chemists (ASBC) standards. “When we wrote our hops protocols in 2011, we said hops must be tested, but the labs we were using weren't doing ASBC analyses,” says Bélanger. “Now we’re requiring ASBC analysis standards for our hops.”

In their laboratory, Gorst Valley Hops experts can identify everything from beer pH, acidity and bitterness to beer protein content, diacetyl content, total polyphenols, among many other analyses. “Our lab has the capability to perform nearly every ASBC-published method, says James Altwies, Gorst Valley Hops director. “Having this capability in-house allows Gorst Valley Hops to provide as much analytical data regarding quality in both beer and ingredients any brewer or grower might need. With so much marketing concerning ‘only the finest quality ingredients,’ we feel it is important to provide standardized, peer-reviewed evidence. Using ASBC methods and investing in a complete laboratory allows us to do just that.”

Middleton, Wisconsin-based Capital Brewery brewmaster Kirby Nelson first met Altwies at a Gorst Valley Hops-taught seminar. “What impressed me with Gorst Valley Hops is that they approach the business as professionals and hop growing as an art and a science in its own right—and not just dropping hops off at the loading dock,” says Nelson. “At that seminar, I realized Gorst Valley Hops staff did their homework and understands the industry.”

That’s among the reasons Nelson turned to Gorst Valley Hops to help him develop a new beer. “I love to support a local industry such as Gorst Valley Hops, but have them do all the work and deliver a high-quality hop,” he says. “They really paid attention—and as brewers, that’s what we’re looking for.”

For the beer he envisioned, Nelson knew he wanted to use a Wisconsin-grown hop. Using the Gorst Valley Hops lab, Nelson and Altwies decided on Nugget as the hop variety. In collaboration, the two refined both the beer flavor and the process for brewing it. Nelson debuted his beer—Hop Cream, a uniquely Wisconsin ale—in December 2011. “James did a very good job listening to what I liked and didn’t like,” says Nelson. “Based on the science and on his knowledge of the hops and the brewing process, he gave me tips about how to brew the beer more intelligently.”

Like Nelson, Bélanger knows that locally grown ingredients aren’t necessarily the best ingredients. “I’ve done my homework and found the best purveyors, and Gorst Valley Hops is working very hard to make sure it is the best,” says Bélanger. “Not only am I using the finest ingredients in my beers—I can prove it.”

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