

Barley Crop Report, Harvest 2005.

Compiled by Robin Appel Ltd

Exclusively for the Brewery Customers of Warminster Maltings Ltd

Winter Barley

As with last year the country can be divided down the middle with regard to quality, except the roles are reversed. The eastern half has enjoyed a good harvest with fair yields of low nitrogen winter barley, but the south and west has suffered with higher nitrogens and high screenings in places. Pearl barley, a much scaled down crop compared to previous years, suffered the worst, but on the other hand, grand old Maris Otter has prevailed, as ever. Despite the obstacle of an exceedingly dry spring, and late frosts in May, Maris Otter barley has produced some particularly fine samples, although some crop yields have been a bit on the lean side. There has been no incidence of skinning or splitting, so maltsters requirements will be met in full.

Spring Barley

Early in the season there were fears for the prospects of the spring crop as the ground got drier, and the weather got warmer, but 'just in time' beneficial rains allowed the crops to hang on. Establishment in the spring had been slow, but when the weather warmed up at least the roots were well established and maintained the crops in good fettle during the dry growing season. In late May and early June not only were conditions still particularly dry, but cold weather, including the late frosts (referred to above) held development back, and when the crops did have the chance to flourish growth was rapid and the crops took up a lot of the nitrogen into the grain. This has resulted in some very high nitrogen barleys that will not make malting quality. However, for the most part, our contract growers on the chalk soils of Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset have produced bold, low nitrogen barleys so Warminster Maltings will again have direct access to the pick of the crop and sustainable supplies of top quality Optic.

2006

Looking ahead, the overall area of winter barley is downsizing again as returns from the mainstream varieties (Fanfare, Pearl etc) continue to diminish. Against this background, a lot of hard work has had to be invested in persuading farmers to plant Maris Otter to meet expanding demand. It will also require careful negotiations with potential Spring Optic growers to persuade them to plant the variety once more. There are two reasons for this. There are new and improved varieties tempting farmers to switch, but more importantly, if ex farm prices fail to equate to profit, growers now have the option to plant nothing at all and instead now live off the new 'Single Farm Payment'.

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