

10<sup>th</sup> September 2020

## The Great British Hop Harvest - 2020 a Year to Remember

The British Hop harvest is dramatic, noisy, frenetic and does not last very long. In just a few weeks in September British hop farms will have completed the harvest of one of our oldest, most romantic, most fabulously aromatic British crops. British Hops are grown in two significant regions - Herefordshire & Worcestershire and Kent, Surrey, Sussex & Hampshire. During harvest the whole hop bines (measuring 5-6m in length) are taken out of the hop yards to a "picking" machine, which strips the hop bine, separates the hop from the leaf and conveys the hops into the kilns where they are dried before being conditioned and baled.

September is the month when the hop growing year culminates: from stringing the hop yard in March, training the hop plant in April, through the summer months of pest & disease protection, to ensuring that the hops are ready to harvest in September. Usually it is the weather that defines the success or failure of the hop crop but this year we will remember not the weather, but COVID-19. This year's weather conditions have been mixed for hops with a very wet winter followed by a long, dry spring and early summer into a cooler and wetter August.

With lockdown, the pub trade stopped overnight at the end of March and since opening up again in early July, on-trade sales have been ok but nowhere near pre-pandemic levels. Many pubs have significantly reduced their cask ale hand pumps – bad news for cask brewers and for British Hop farmers. *Vernon Amor, Head Brewer at Wye Valley Brewery has concerns that breweries could face catastrophic change: "Brewing with British Hops since our inception, we have always understood the importance of a home-grown crop to the success of our award winning cask beers. A world without the complexity, aromas and flavours they provide is a grim reality we could be facing if we loose the industry and our beers would simply not be the same!"*

For the farmers, uncertainties included labour availability for training and picking the hops, market demands and now future contracts to grow the crop itself. On most farms, the picking and drying infrastructure is worth between £2-3 million. COVID-19 will create a large hop surplus and raises significant doubt about the future of the industry.

The farmers are doing everything they can to ease the situation, reducing their yields and on some farms they have removed hops altogether. One farm removed 26% of its hop acreage this year to try to reduce their exposure. If farms stop farming hops they will not come back into the industry – the costs are too prohibitive. *Simon Parker, Chair of the British Hop Association fears for what might be lost if we cannot save the industry: "The present situation for British Hop growers is unprecedented but not only is the industry under threat, so too is the world renowned British hop breeding programme which would also be lost. Hops are a permanent crop requiring high levels of investment which cannot simply be turned on or off - once they are gone, they are gone for good."*

**The growers' message to beer lovers in the UK and around the world: please support the homegrown industry, buy beer made with British Hops because they have the lowest carbon footprint, the highest provenance, the greatest range of flavours and aromas and a world-leading breeding programme.**

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Note to Editors: To discuss a socially distanced visit to a farm during the British Hop harvest, or for more information please contact: Ali Capper, British Hop Association: 01886 884202, 07973 562139 or [alicapper@mac.com](mailto:alicapper@mac.com) [www.britishhops.org.uk](http://www.britishhops.org.uk)