



NEWSLETTER 2011-12

Healthy planting stocks

A new isolation glasshouse for the elite, virus-tested stocks of all the British hop varieties currently being grown has been established at Stockbridge Technology Centre, near York. The glasshouse is screened against aphids and the plants will be monitored by the government agency Fera to provide the highest health status certified planting stocks for the British hop industry, known as A+ quality. Duplicate pots of all the varieties at STC have also been planted at China Farm, Kent to allow them to be checked for trueness-to-type. Stocks from STC will enter the Plant Health Propagation Scheme (PHPS) from 2014 onwards.



Hops for flavour

Much of the work of Wye Hops Ltd is now directed at developing flavour; both classic British flavours, and the more exotic, high-impact flavours championed by the craft brewing sector. During the last year, such work could be found at all stages of the selection programme - genotypes selected for their flavour have been planted in yield and agronomic trials, seedling progeny have been raised combining the citrus flavours of Cascade with pest and disease resistance, and crosses have been made to develop the spicy notes found in Saaz and Endeavour. Endeavour is being propagated for planting in trials at several more farm sites. Expect a much greater range of flavours to be available from British hops over the next few years!

A germplasm collection, not a museum

The collection of historic varieties, elite breeding lines and selections built up by Wye College over 100 years is now established at Wye Hops Ltd. Accessions in the collection which had not had any detailed oil or resin analyses have now been harvested and tested. Varieties, some of which were rejected by brewers in the 50s and 60s, are being reappraised in the light of modern brewery preferences in pilot-scale brews organised through the IBD Hops Industry Committee. Some historic varieties, such as Colgate (1805 origin), have been part of the crossing programme in 2012. The collection of hop germplasm is not a variety museum but is being actively used and evaluated.

Threats at the border

There are no quarantine restrictions for importing hop plants into Britain or the EU. Therefore, the risk of introducing non-indigenous hop diseases remains an ever-present threat. In particular, the introduction of Hop Stunt Viroid on infected plants from the USA or Asia could have a devastating effect on the domestic hop industry. Wye Hops Ltd has been actively involved in bringing all importers of hop plants into the PHPS scheme so that their nurseries are monitored by Plant Health officials. However, some unregulated trade in hop plants still remains which presents a real danger. If you are buying hop plants, especially on-line, please ensure that they come from a PHPS-registered source. It is no understatement to say that to buy outside of this scheme risks the whole of the hop industry in Britain. Wye Hops Ltd has also arranged to supply clean tested stocks of the main US varieties, such as Willamette, to the PHPS nurseries. There will be no need to risk imports direct from the USA for these varieties.

2012 Top of the Hops

Now that the new hop breeding programme is fully up and running, there are just over 3000 female seedlings available each year for selection in September. About 350 of these are chosen to be harvested, dried and analysed. It would be usual to discard the remainder. But, from the 2011 harvest, the Great Yorkshire Brewery in Pickering, formerly Cropton Brewery, arranged for exactly 2,012 of these 'varieties' to be harvested and blended and used to brew a beer. The resulting brew was marketed in spring 2012 through the Nicholson's pub chain with very favourable reactions. It would not have been possible to harvest from 2,012 different varieties until this stage in the development of the new programme.

Whatever the weather brings

No two hop seasons are alike but the weather during the first part of 2012 has been extreme. Almost forgotten under the deluges of June and July was a very warm and dry end to February with several days above 13.5 °C. This was enough to induce the problem of spring dormancy in some varieties, notably Bramling Cross and Goldings. In anticipation of such problems, Wye Hops has received a grant from the IBD to assess spring dormancy in hop progeny derived from South African germplasm. Useful observations were made in the spring. The aim is to develop hop breeding lines which are not susceptible to spring dormancy problems, whatever the weather.



Getting the word out

The work at Wye Hops Ltd continues to retain its international reputation and has been cited in many recent articles and books on hops. This is, in part, due to a continued determination to broadcast the work being done. Over the twelve months to August 2012, there have been three publications and 34 separate presentations, talks, interviews, reports, posters etc. - almost one every week. Many of these have been blogged - try Googling Wye Hops!

Contact

If you have any comments or questions on the articles in this newsletter, or for more detailed information, please contact Peter Darby (01227 781056), email: peter.darby@wyehops.co.uk

The Directors of Wye Hops Ltd are John Andrews, Thomas Hawkins, Stuart Highwood, Bobby Neame, and Tony Redsell and they would also be pleased to give you more information about the project.

Not just dwarfs!

The objectives for Wye Hops Ltd include a greater emphasis on breeding tall varieties for growing under conventional wirework, compared to work at Wye College. From the first crosses made by Wye Hops Ltd in 2007, advanced plots of four tall selections have been propagated and planted in spring 2012 for assessment of their potential.

How is Wye Hops funded?

Wye Hops Ltd recently took part in a survey from the European Commission Joint Research Centre looking at the balance between private and public funding. When the programme was at Wye College, nearly 50% of the funding came from public sources via Defra. Wye Hops Ltd now receives no public funds at all. For the last financial year, a levy on hop growers and royalties from registered varieties provided 42% of the income. Grants, including those from the IBD and BBPA, accounted 19%, while contract work and sales provided 39% of income. Wye Hops Ltd would like to thank all those who contribute to the research programme.

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