

Goodlot farms continues to enhance production in Caledon

Written By KIRA WRONSKA DORWARD

"Beer is one of the most common drinks and fermentation is often credited with being a major contributor to modern civilization," said Phil Winters, founder, along with his wife Gail, of the Goodlot Farmstead Brewing Company, located near Alton. "Beer traditionally brings people together—we wanted to make beers that really represent Caledon, and the taste of Caledon, Headwaters, and the Greenbelt Region. We're pursuing our passion now in creating a sustainably-run family farm."

Originally hailing from Sault Ste Marie, Winters has an interest in craft beer and sustainable energy. He spent the first decade of his career as a political organizer working on youth democratic engagement, climate change issues, and then moved to the private sector working in the solar industry for 15 years before building a solar powered farm and brewery. With his wife Gail, a former film producer, and Caledon native, the Winters made the decision to move back to her hometown to raise both a family and crops on the farm house and lot they had just purchased in 2009.

Both keen gardeners, the Winters took an inventory of specific crops of interest to grow that year and became aware of the hop shortage. The Winters began to research the plants in craft beer making and met with other local growers. By December of 2009 they had decided to plant 125 hops rhizomes, a modified subterranean plant stem that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes that grow horizontally underground and on stems in five variations for the coming year. Experimenting themselves with how the plants liked to grow, they built an initial infrastructure capable of carrying 10,000 pounds of live loads within a heavily engineered trellised system, which allows plants to grow up to 25 feet. "It's like grapes on steroids," said Winters, commenting on the sheer size of his chosen crop. In addition to the size and volume necessities of the crop, hops also take three years to mature, although they are harvested in their second year of growth. After receiving good feedback from brewers to whom the Winters' sold their crops, they expanded their family operation in 2013 to 2000 rhizomes and built a larger hop yard on the property.

"This is probably the worst time in the history of the planet to become a farmer," Winters said. Climate chaos. "Aside from volume alone, hops are a notoriously difficult crop to cultivate, and even more so for the organic farmer. Prone to devastation from all sorts of natural predators, all too often little can be done to save a threatened crop without compromising the values of organic growing. The Winters are one of the few organic hops farmers in Ontario, and do not spray their hops with herbicides or chemicals of any kind, but instead focus on organic farming methods and soil health. Phil, as an environmental activist, is all too aware of the shocking trace amounts of round-up in most alcoholic beverages and committed himself to a different course of action.

The Winters' went so far with their vision as to co-found the Ontario Hops Growers Association in 2011, with a handful of other Ontario growers, including their processing partner Nicholas Shout of BigHead Hops, who, located in Meaford, happens to be the largest grower of organic hops in Canada. The intention of the organization, or #BREWON, is to promote brews made with Ontario hops in Ontario beers. Instead of letting Ontario brewers treat hops like a cheap and readily available commodity available anywhere, #BREWON would ask brewers to make long-term commitment to using Ontario hops. Goodlot itself uses 100% Ontario hops from four different farms, and is thoroughly committed to encouraging other brewers to join the organization and do the same.

The Winters continued to sell their hops to more brewers, who in turn provided them with more positive feedback. The use of hops in beer is multipurpose. Most importantly, they act as a preservative, but they also alter the flavour of a brew. For instance, a bittering hop counter balances the sugar in the malt, making a drink less sweet, while an aroma hop gives the particular beer a nose, or smell that affects the perception of a brew's taste. While experimenting with different hops, the Winters and their staff, including brewer Zach Tremaine, began developing beer recipes around their crops. Working with two brewers, they developed three recipes using their own hops with what Phil describes as a "stove top" and homebrew approach. This is where the Goodlot Farmstead Brewing Company would eventually sprout fully formed like a hop on the vine.

In 2015, Phil and Gail made the decision to take the plunge and expand by vertically integrating their farm, crops, and beer. With an original half a million dollar budget, the Winters opened their own brewery and expanded into a much larger business. After

Christmas of 2017, they launched their first brew in 80 bars and LCBOs while continuing to work on the farm site. Their mandate: to reuse all materials around the farm, hire subcontractors as locally as possible, and source their materials in the same way. For instance, Phil takes great pride in the brewery itself, which is a Fourth Pig Worker co-op renovated barn that is now a carbon-free, air-tight building, where even the steam from the vats is captured and recycled to brew the next batch of Goodlot beer.

“We are looking into protecting the future of the planet,” said Winters, “businesses in the 21st century shouldn't contribute to carbon emissions, and you we can always create more green energy than energy consumed.” Goodlot is immensely proud of being perhaps the first carbon-free brewery in North America, using only electricity and not gas energy. “Being carbon-positive is the goal,” Winters emphasized. “We are very conscious of our carbon footprint.”

After years of careful research, built infrastructure, experimentation, and above all extreme personal dedication, Phil and Gail Winters have finally opened the doors of what is to be not just a beer company, but an experience in beer consumption and the natural beauty that Caledon has to offer. The Winters' intention is that Goodlot Farm be a community hub, and, “to give people in the rest of Peel the advantage of the beauty and the green space [in Caledon].” The grounds, which though less inviting in wintertime, include a tasting room, and indoor winter space, an outdoor patio to be used as a Beergarden in the summer, and a uniquely designed bottle shop that cannot be described, but one has to see for themselves. There is also the entirety of the Goodlot 27 acre farm, with trails and paths and open spaces that the Winters hope will be used by their patrons to enjoy a genuine Caledon experience.

In terms of products, the Winters will continue to experiment with new ingredients in their “hyper-local farm raised beer” over the winter. Their current and most popular recipe, a pale ale Winters describes as “sunshine in a can”, having a lift “that makes it so distinctive,” is available in some bars and LCBOs, and of course on the farm itself.

Winter hours of operation on the farm are weekends Friday-Sunday 12pm-6pm. To speak with the Farm Manager, Gail Winters can be reached at 416-875-3635. The farm itself is located at 18825 Shaws Creek Rd, with an office line available at (519) 927-5881. “We're really excited to finally open our gates on the farm and share our recipes. The community has been very patient with us, and for that we are very grateful.”