

# READY FOR A HEADY?

## THE ALCHEMIST BREWERY PROGRESSES IN SUSTAINABILITY

Jen Kimmich describes how The Alchemist is constantly moving to reduce environmental impacts of Vermont's famous Heady Topper

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John and Jen Kimmich founded The Alchemist in Waterbury, VT in 2001, which now focuses solely on one beer that has gained an almost cult-like following. But, this company does more in the way of environmental responsibility than having the humorous, yet serious message: "Don't be a D-bag, recycle this can!" printed on the back of their product.

Six strains of hops are used to make the "elusive" Heady Topper *double* IPA. (DIPA=lots of hops.) John has cultured a strain of yeast of his own, but since the special hops for HT don't grow well in the VT climate, they are sourced from out West, along with the barley for malting. Though Germany and Russia are the world leaders in hop and barley production, respectively, The Alchemist saves distribution costs and reduces the beer's carbon footprint by purchasing US-grown hops. Once the beer is produced, it is not distributed far from the brewery, further reducing pollution due to transporting the beer. However, serious beer enthusiasts from all over travel long distances to acquire Heady Topper.

Leftover malt from the brewing process, usually considered a waste product, is picked up by local farmers to feed their livestock. "Our spent grain is full of good sugars, so it's fed to local cows and pigs," Jen Kimmich told me on Monday morning. When asked about the brewery's water usage, she admitted, "We're using as much water as the town will allow us to use," but she then explained how the Waterbury brewery deals with the production wastewater: "When we transfer the beer from the fermenter to the conditioning tank at the end, we draw all the [yeast] from the bottom of the cone fermenter and that goes to compost. All of our tank wash water—which is high in sugars and organic material—that gets composted as well. So, we really concentrate on side-streaming as much water as possible, specifically the water that has high concentrations of organic material."

At the soon-to-open location in Stowe, there will be a MMBR wastewater treatment system, which was chosen over the traditional method as well as one that utilized algae. "We are going with a system that is pretty cutting-edge; there's nothing like it in the state, but it is proven technology. It comes from a company called World Water Works and we just finished a one-month pilot program here at the brewery and it was very effective at lowering our BOD and making our pH levels consistent. What it's called is a Moving Bed Biofilm Reactor." World Water Works recently received an AAES Honor Award for Environmental Sustainability.

So, even if IPAs aren't your style, you now have a reason to love Heady Topper!

