

Hop Growing in Washington...

he Washington State Hop industry, nestled at the base of the Cascade mountain range in the Yakima Valley, is home to one of the most fertile and productive growing regions in the World. The desert like conditions of the area coupled with the abundant irrigation provided by the Yakima River Watershed create an ideal environment to produce hops. With its long, sunny days, the Yakima Valley is one of the few areas of the World where new plantings of hops in the spring have the ability to produce a full crop in the first year.

The Yakima Valley contains approximately 75 percent of the total United States hop acreage, with an average farm size of 450 acres (182 hectares) accounting for over 77 percent of the total United States hop crop. Most hop farms in Washington are third or fourth generation family operations that have now diversified into other crops as well. Most hop growers also grow fruit, but some grow mint, grapes and even row crops. Typically, a Washington hop grower will raise a combination of both aroma and alpha variety hops. The majority of the hops produced in Washington however are alpha and super alpha varieties. As we begin the 21st century, important Washington aroma varieties include Willamette, Cascade, and Mt. Hood. Alpha varieties include Columbus/Tomahawk, Zeus, Nugget, and Galena, which when combined account for over half of the total Washington hop acreage.

In the State of Washington hops are only grown commercially in the Yakima Valley. However, within this valley there are three distinct growing areas, the Moxee Valley, the Yakama Indian Reservation, and the Lower Yakima Valley. Each of these areas, while no more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) apart, possess unique growing conditions. The Lower Yakima Valley, with its slightly warmer climate, can produce outstanding yields during first year (baby) hop plantings. Many other crops grow in the lower Yakima Valley enabling growers to easily diversify. The Yakama Indian Reservation, located in the center of the Yakima Valley, is most noted for its vast open spaces and its ability to produce superior alpha levels. Hops yards in this area consist of large often square blocks of hops, each of which can be well over 80 acres. Because of the increased yields produced by the super alpha hop varieties, growers on "The Reservation", as it is commonly called by growers, are among the most efficient in the world. The Moxee Valley has a slightly cooler climate and is located in the northern part of the Yakima Valley. Due to its cooler temperatures, outstanding aroma crops are grown there. Another unique characteristic of the Moxee Valley is the extremely high density of hop yards. In fact, in the Moxee Valley it is almost impossible to avoid driving by a hop yard and all the main commercial varieties are produced there.

The Yakima Valley of Washington State is one of the most important hop growing regions in the world. Approximately two-thirds of the hops produced in the Yakima Valley are exported to countries all over the globe. Sophisticated, environmentally friendly, irrigation techniques, combined with ideal growing conditions enable Washington State to consistently produce the finest hops in the world.