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Australia based Asahi Beverages adapts direct purchase model to achieve sustainability targets

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Victorian beer lovers can now enjoy Carlton Draught, Victoria Bitter and other iconic beers knowing they’ve been brewed with 100% Victorian barley purchased direct from local farmers. For the first time in decades, beer brewed entirely with barley sourced straight from Wimmera and Mallee farms is now rolling off the line at the famous Abbotsford Brewery in Melbourne.



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The major change comes after Asahi Beverages, which owns Carlton & United Breweries, earlier this year removed intermediaries such as bulk grain handlers from the barley supply chain. As part of the new program, farmers get payments that otherwise have gone to the bulk handlers and Asahi Beverages gets clear sight of the growing process to ensure only the best, sustainably grown barley is used. Abbotsford Head Brewer Sarah Laing said: “Barley malt is the heart and soul of our beer and defines its taste, aroma, colour and foam.

It’s fantastic Victorians can now enjoy a fresh Carlton Draught, Victoria Bitter or any beer brewed at Abbotsford knowing they’re directly supporting sustainable growing practices and Victorian farmers. “We buy 30,000 tonnes of barley each year for Abbotsford and, barring natural disasters such as a drought, our barley will only be purchased direct from Victorian farms from now on. Fresh, local and delicious, it doesn’t get much better than that!” Barley is one of beer’s four key ingredients along with hops, yeast and water.

Under the old model, farmers sold barley grain to bulk grain handlers who stored it all together, meaning grains from potentially hundreds of different farmers were mixed together before they reached Abbotsford. However, under the new program, the provenance of a grain can be traced right back to the paddock. This will help us better understand the variables that influence barley quality and means beer lovers can be told precisely where the barley has been grown. The

program also monitors agricultural inputs to help Asahi Beverages achieve our sustainability targets. More than 30 Victorian farmers have signed up to the new program.

To mark the new beer coming off the line, Sarah travelled to the Wimmera to give some personalised slabs of commemorative Carlton Draught to farmer John Bennett, who grew the barley used in it. Sarah said: “Having direct relationships with more farmers is a real win for everyone involved. Farmers can access our experience and over time we can collect long-term data to help them grow the best crops possible, not just for our use but for them to sell to other buyers.

“In return, we get guaranteed supply of the highest-quality barley available and certainty that the barley is grown sustainability, which is great news for every Victorian who enjoys a beer. “It’s exciting to be able to bring a couple of cartons of beer back to their origin to the people who grew the barley in the field where it was produced.” Wimmera farmer John Bennett said: “Working directly with the brewers to produce the highest quality grain and beers is fantastic.

It feels very rewarding to drink a Carlton Draught knowing the grain for that exact beer was grown in our paddock and has come full circle. “This direct purchase model not only benefits farmers but the communities we live in too.” Asahi Beverages’ direct-purchase program has recently expanded to Queensland and NSW, bringing the amount of barley that will be directly purchased from farmers across Australia to about 70,000 tonnes a year. There are also plans to expand it to Asahi Beverages’ smaller breweries such as Cascade in Hobart. Until recently, the expertise to introduce a program like this didn’t exist in Australia. But Asahi Beverages has now partnered with supply chain managers Origin Trail and Pure Grain to deliver it.