

What's in your beer? Carlsberg bets on regenerative farming

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As the brewing industry confronts the environmental impact of its raw materials, Carlsberg Denmark is at the forefront of the movement towards a more sustainable future, beginning with the cultivation of ingredients. Leading this initiative is Stig Schneider Johnsen, the ESG Responsible for Carlsberg Denmark, who is steering the company's ambitious goal of transitioning to 100 per cent regeneratively grown barley malt.

In this exclusive interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum, Johnsen discusses the motivations behind Carlsberg's climate-conscious decision, the framework they have developed to define regenerative agriculture, and the collaborative efforts with farmers and maltsters that facilitated the successful scaling from pilot programs to full production. He also shares insights on consumer reactions to Grobund, the company's first beer brewed with entirely regenerative barley, and outlines the crucial milestones on the path to 2040, when Carlsberg aims to source all its raw materials through regenerative practices.

What inspired Carlsberg to take this step toward using 100 per cent regeneratively grown barley malt?

Our decision to brew a beer using 100 per cent regeneratively grown barley malt was driven by the urgent need to reduce agricultural emissions and improve soil health—two critical levers in our broader climate strategy. Approximately 24 per cent of our total value chain CO₂e emissions on the Group level stem from raw materials, with malt accounting for about half of

that. Transitioning to regenerative practices is, therefore, a strategic imperative to decrease our footprint and support biodiversity.

What does regenerative agriculture mean within Carlsberg's strategy, and how was your definition developed?

Regenerative agriculture is central to our ambition of sourcing 100 per cent of our raw materials from regenerative practices by 2040. Recognising the absence of a universal definition, we developed our framework in collaboration with agricultural advisors and inspirations from the SAI Platform's "Regenerating Together" working group. Our definition is grounded in these core principles: crop rotation, year-round soil cover, minimal soil disturbance, minimal input use, and a strict ban on insecticides. These principles are designed to enhance soil health, reduce emissions, and promote biodiversity. We also encourage voluntary practices such as agroforestry, organic matter addition, and precision farming to further strengthen outcomes.

What were the key challenges in scaling from 500 to 14,800 tonnes of regenerative barley malt, and how were they addressed?

Scaling regenerative barley production from 500 to 14,800 tonnes—equivalent to approximately 100 million litres of beer—required close collaboration across our value chain and with our supply chain partners. Interestingly, the transition has been less challenging than one might expect. The Danish agricultural sector has responded swiftly and constructively to our demand for regeneratively grown barley and found around 50 new farmers who live up to our principles.

What role do maltsters like Fuglsang and Viking Malt play in this transformation?

Our partners have been agile in supporting our transition to regenerative barley. They responded quickly to our ambitions, enabling us to scale up supply efficiently and without delay. Their ability to deliver high-quality regenerative malt at short notice has been crucial to the success of this initiative.

How have consumers responded to Grobund, and is sustainability influencing preferences or loyalty?

The initial response to Grobund has been very positive. Launched at Folkemødet and available exclusively at the Home of Carlsberg, the beer has sparked meaningful conversations about the future of agriculture and climate action. While Grobund was produced in limited quantities, it serves as a symbol of what is possible. We are indeed observing a growing segment of consumers who prioritise sustainability in their purchasing decisions, and initiatives like this help reinforce brand trust and loyalty among consumers.

What are the next milestones on Carlsberg's path to 100 per cent regenerative grain by 2040?

Looking ahead, our key milestones include reaching 30 per cent regenerative raw material sourcing globally by 2030. We are calling for a common definition of regenerative practices and are also engaging in research to better quantify the environmental benefits of regenerative agriculture, including CO₂ reduction, biodiversity gains, and soil carbon sequestration. Continued collaboration with farmers, suppliers, and policymakers will be essential to scale these practices and ensure their long-term viability.

Shraddha Warde

shraddha.warde@mmactiv.com