

SUSTAINABLE SUDS

While a number of profitable Washington breweries lay claim to sustainability efforts, there are a handful that exemplify various aspects of the ethos — environmental and beyond.



Story by Adam Sawyer

Fremont Brewing

Much like the words “green” or “eco-friendly,” “sustainable” has become more than an omnipresent part of the Pacific Northwest vocabulary. For many, it has morphed from a word to an idea, then became a call to action that developed into a way of life.

“Sustainable” has become so indelible that it is sometimes thrown around generically, without consideration of what it truly means. Granted, the barometer for what qualifies can be subjectively calibrated. But there are a number of agreed-upon standards and accreditations that can aid in sussing out whether a business practices are actually meeting muster — or if they are just affixing labels in an effort to keep up with consumer trends. Brewing beer is an act that lends itself to the pursuit of resource preservation, or sustainability.

As beer is roughly 95% water, without ample, clean and reliable amounts of it, you have no product. To a lesser degree, the same applies to grain and hops. Accordingly, a number of breweries participate in the Washington Wild’s Brewshed Alliance, a program designed to highlight the overlapping interests between conservation and brewing communities. In the case of Leavenworth’s Icicle Brewing Company, they are founding partners of the Brewshed Alliance.

The Alpine Lakes Wilderness protects the namesake and water supply for Icicle Brewery Company. Co-owner Pamela Brulotte, was one of the strongest and most vocal supporters of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions legislation. With the help of the nonprofit Washington Wild, the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Expansion law was passed in December 2014. This act which benefits conservationists, outdoor recreation lovers, and beer drinkers alike, permanently protects more than 22,000 acres of wilderness adjacent to the existing Alpine Lakes Wilderness area along with nearly 40 miles of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and Pratt rivers combined.

Brewing beer in the Northwest has become a wildly competitive endeavor. How plausible is it for breweries to be truly sustainable and still thrive in a saturated market? While a number of profitable Washington breweries lay claim to sustainability efforts, there are a handful that exemplify various aspects of the ethos — environmental and beyond.

Every beer brewed by Bellingham’s Aslan Brewing Com-

pany in 2018 was certified organic by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Due in large part to the additional work and expense involved with cultivation, organic ingredient options can be limited and commensurately costly when compared to conventional ingredients. Because many consumers in the region have a preference for organic, there are a number of local suppliers that specialize in organic malt and hops, which allows Aslan to simultaneously

source from and serve, the community.

In 2018, Aslan started a nine-month plastic-film collection and recycling program company-wide, stopping 1,044 pounds of plastic film from ending up in landfills. Since 2017, they’ve partnered with Growing Veterans, a nonprofit that empowers veterans to cultivate purpose and a sense of belonging by “growing food, community and each other.” Aslan harvests, purchases and brews their organic hops to make a fresh-hop collaborative IPA beer named Charlie Foxtrot, then donates a portion of the sales back to Growing Veterans. And as a part of Aslan’s Environmental Purchasing Policy, ingredients grown in Whatcom and Skagit counties are used for the brewery and kitchen. Their efforts help stimulate the local economy, while also producing legions of loyal fans.

In Seattle, Fremont Brewing Company is equal parts upper echelon brewery and conduit to a better planet. Fremont was co-founded by former home-brewer and attorney Matt Lincecum along with PhD teacher, and all-around do-gooder



Aslan Brewing

Sara Nelson. Matt handles the heavy lifting on the beer side, while Sara takes the reins for positive change. They have attained a zero-waste production process, source local and organic ingredients, and are integral members of a number of advocacy and conservation programs. As a result, they received a Washington Manufacturer of the Year Award in 2015, a Green/Sustainable Business Award in 2018, and a Triple Bottom Line Sustainability Award in 2017 — recognizing efforts for social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

In another form of sustainability, Fremont Brewing supports the Homefront IPA and Ales for ALS. Homefront IPA was created in 2011 by craft brewers with one goal in mind: to honor and support the men and women of America's armed forces. The exclusive participating breweries that support Ales for ALS are offered a specific hop blend, with the exchange that a special brew is made with it and a portion of those beer sales return back to Ales for ALS for research and therapy for the destructive disease of ALS. Fremont Brewing is also a strong supporter of local art, literacy and food bank initiatives. While their official tagline reads "Because Beer Matters," their unofficial motto continues on to say "because it's the right thing to do."

While conserving resources can help save money, integrating sustainable practices aren't always easy or cost-effective, especially when efforts go beyond the environment and into bolstering the community as well as the lives of employees.

That's just fine with breweries like Icicle, Aslan and Fremont. It all seems to be working well and who knows, they just might be earning some karmic kick. 🍷



Aslan. growing organic hops with Veterans Collaboration

