

Local breweries lead the way in eco-friendly beers

Colorado has a sudsy social consciousness running right through it. For example, renowned locally based companies like New Belgium Brewing and O'Dell Brewing Company - both in Ft. Collins - as well as Coors Brewing in Golden are working green by utilizing renewable energy and recycled products. And smaller breweries, along with the state's countless beer enthusiasts looking to reduce their carbon footprint, are meeting in the middle and reaping the rewards on both ends.

One of the largest brewers in the world, Coors Brewing, boasts environmental concerns and has implemented green business practices dating back to 1959. The company was the first to introduce aluminum cans and spurred on the recycling initiative by offer customers the incentive to recycle by offering a penny a can. To this date, the company sells roughly 1.5 million gallons of ethanol - a brewing byproduct - to Colorado refineries. In addition, Coors sells 600 million pounds of other solid material as cattle feed to local farmers - turning what was once considered trash into eco-friendly feed.

In 1998 New Belgium Brewing Company became the first brewery in the nation to use wind-powered electricity. The eco-friendly folks at New Belgium also turn their old keg caps into tabletops, uses sun tubes to light its warehouse and heats its building with the same water it uses to brew beer.

At Odell, they bottle their beers only in recyclable glass and utilize recycled paper for their six-pack holders. Like their neighbors at New Belgium, they also run on wind power. Additionally, they are connected right into the Ft. Collins city grid via a "hot box" - when the city's power is running at peak demand, the box automatically signals the brewery to shut down a few coolers - saving power.

Oskar Blues, out of Lyons, has pioneered an incredibly popular "new" form of micro-brewing by canning their beers - other companies following suit include New Belgium, Ska Brewing out of Durango and Denver-based brewpub Breckenridge Breweries. Cans are easier on the environment: aluminum is infinitely recyclable and cans are nearly 50 percent lighter to ship than bottles, which greatly reduces their carbon footprint.

And by drinking local, Colorado beer enthusiasts help further reduce their own carbon footprint by enjoying their favorite brew. It's a hoppy solution and a happy method of going green.