

## Hops and Brew School Hop Harvesting Tour

Written by Mark Emiley

Tuesday, 09 September 2008 19:36 - Last Updated Tuesday, 09 September 2008 19:54

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On the tour of the hop fields, we first visited an organic field. I think the first thing I noticed while we were there was the sheer number of bugs flying around. After visiting the non-organic fields, the number of bugs present at the first field was even more pronounced. I hate to say it but the sprays used to keep pests at bay really make a difference. They have been looking into water spray/irrigation systems from above which help cut down pests as well. We didn't spend too long at this field but were told that instead of the normal harvests of a couple thousand pounds per acre, these fields were getting as low as 400 lb/acre. That kind of a sacrifice in yield is tremendous and very difficult to maintain a profit on. New Zealand is lucky not to have the pests that we do here! Hence that is where most of the organic hops of the world come from.



Next we'll discuss the harvesting. So, hops are typically grown up a trellis, with four main vines heading up from the crown. They will climb up 18 feet and produce the most and best hops up at the top. To harvest them, first a machine works its way through the field cutting them off at

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the bottom. Think of a truck with chainsaws sticking out from the front bumper.

Once the chords and vines are hanging only from the top, the second team moves into place. First there is a "pickup truck" with a very wide bed with high walls (10-12 feet). Right behind it is a second harvester truck comes through, this time with "chainsaws" sticking out of a lift on the top. The pickup truck begins driving through the field (driving basically into the vines so that they move over the top of the truck) with the harvester right behind it such that as the harvester cuts the vines at the top, they fall and lay down into the bed of the pickup truck. The vines start to pile up very quickly.



We toured two hop processing facilities (one medium sized and one large). They were pretty much the same between the two so I will describe the basic process. The trucks with the hops in the back drive up to the harvesting facility. People then get on top of the trucks and start attaching the vines to karabiners which carry the vines up a good 50 feet so they are hanging in the air.



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Today's hop crop is expected to be a record, with a total of 1.2 million pounds of hops harvested. The hops are currently being dried in this facility, which is one of the largest in the world. The hops are then sold to breweries, which use them to brew beer. The hops are a key ingredient in beer, and their quality is crucial to the final product. The hops are also used in other products, such as hop oil and hop extract. The hops are a valuable crop, and their production is an important part of the brewing industry.



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populated in the mid-19th century, and the hop industry was established in the early 20th century. Once the

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giving them the opportunity to see the hop harvest and processing. The tour was a great success and we were able to provide a lot of information to the students. We also had a great time and enjoyed the tour very much. The students were very interested in the hop harvest and processing and we were able to provide them with a lot of information. We also had a great time and enjoyed the tour very much.