***Meeting of the Bedford Farmers Club***

***May 18, 2022***

***Sing Sing Kill Brewery, Ossining***

President **Mary Farley** welcomed members and guests to the Sing Sing Kill Brewery and noted that 2022 marked the 170th anniversary of the founding of the Bedford Farmers Club. As usual, the Club’s business meeting preceded the afternoon’s speakers.

Secretary **Sheila Crespi** presented the minutes of the April 27, 2022 meeting, when Pete Malinowski, co-founder of the Billion Oyster Project, discussed the goal of restoring one billion oysters to New York Harbor by 2035. To date, 10,000 volunteers, more than 6000 students from 100 schools in the five borough, and 75 restaurants have participated in this project. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

**John Stockbridge** wore two hats at this meeting, first as Treasurer filling in for **Roger Vincent**, who was boating on the Long Island Sound. John reported that the Club is solvent and circulated a clipboard for attendance and collection of annual dues.

As Historian, John recounted the meeting of October 15, 1884, when members debated the suitability of barley grains as food for cattle. Mr. Joseph Benedict maintained that if the barley grains were in the same condition as when they left the brewery, they were good for cattle, but if not, they would not be wholesome food. However, he also said he had seen cows drunk on the grains. It was posited that putrid grains would result in putrid milk that would not be suitable for human consumption. Mr. James Wood, BFC president and meeting host, summed up by saying that when he had asked Dr. Heximer to speak on the subject, Dr. Heximer said he knew nothing about barley grains but he was a good judge of beer, and barley was better than other grains for brewing. Members were then presented with a plate of very fine quinces raised by Mrs. Wood.

Guests included Samantha Marshall, a friend of Marian Cross of Amawalk Farm; Andy Sparks; and Raoul and Amorosa who were attending with Frances Train. Ms. Train had a personal interest in the day’s topic, as her grandson has opened and is successfully operating the Telluride Brewing Company in Colorado.

**Ellen Best** presented Timely Tips on healthy soil and steps to facilitate the infrastructure of microbes in the soil, which makes nutrients available for root systems of plants. One step is to mix inoculant with your seeds when planting. Another is to cover your soil with hay, straw, leaves or wood chips, or to plant cover crops such as oats and buckwheat to put roots into your soil. A third method is to incorporate perennials into your vegetable garden to nourish the soil year-round by creating organic matter, improving filtration and providing aeration. Ellen also discussed other strategies for success in the garden, e.g., waiting until the soil temperature is consistently warm enough to sustain healthy growth before planting; leaving weeds and their supportive root systems in place as long as their growth is not interfering with your primary crops (you can cut the weeds at the soil line); and not tilling your soil, as tilling destroys the roots and microbe infrastructure. Instead, use a pitchfork to aerate your soil and break up compaction.

Mary then introduced the founders of the Sing Sing Kill Brewery, Eric Gearity and Matt Curtin. Head Brewer Matt took the floor. Before establishing SSKB, Matt spent twenty years as a home brewer. In a distant past with no internet, information was shared through clubs like the Salt City Home Brewers in Syracuse, NY, where Matt connected with experienced home brewers and newcomers alike. Home brewing enabled aficionados to try a variety of recipes that differed from the small selection of mass-market beers then available in the area.

Sing Sing Kill Brewery holds a New York Farm Brewery License. The License was established as a way of encouraging farmers to stay on their land growing cash crops that could provide a living, rather than renting or selling their land to the fossil fuel industry for fracking or other operations. New York farmers traditionally grew barley as a feed crop but more recently, with the involvement of brewers and distillers, they are growing barley that has won world-wide acclaim at international competitions.

In 2015 when Sing Sing Kill Brewery first started, there were only 14 Farm Brewery Licenses in New York State. Now there are over 260. This is a tribute to the quality of New York barley and hops, since the license requires products to have 60% of their ingredients from the state. For the past two years, Sing Sing Kill Brewery has sourced 100% of its inputs from New York State.

The name of the Brewery is a nod to local history. The Dutch settled the majority of the towns in the area and “kill” is the Dutch word for creek or small stream; the Sing Sing Kill runs through the center of Ossining. The village was established on land confiscated during the Revolutionary War from the Phillips family after they were found to be British loyalists; it became known as Sing Sing. Many years later, when village and business leaders wanted to distance themselves from the new Sing Sing penitentiary, the name was changed to Ossining. (The expression “up the river” originated at the prison.)

Sing Sing Kill Brewery has embraced the double association of its name: Its first t-shirt was emblazoned with the legend, “It’s Water Not Murder.” In fact, Matt credits the great water environment of the Hudson Valley as a contributing factor to the excellence of the beer in the area. SSKB uses water directly from Ossining’s public supply without any additional filtration, and Matt’s recipes are designed to work with the flavor profile of the water.

The Brewery is now in its second season of partnering with the Schooner Apollonia for grain deliveries. Captain Sam and his crew sail the grain down the Hudson River and off-load it at the Ossining shoreline. Captain Sam then transfers the grain – 300 pounds at a time – onto an electric bike and cycles the last mile up the hill to make delivery at the Brewery door.

Eric jumped in to talk about the pre-opening phase of SSKB and the development of the craft brewing industry in New York State. Before the Brewery opened, Eric and Matt contacted all of the 14 original NYS Farm Brewery Licensees. They toured the facilities of the seven breweries that responded and were welcomed into and helped by the community of craft brewers in the state. At various points both Eric and Matt commented on the extraordinary spirit of camaraderie that exists within the craft beer community. As Eric put it, “It’s about building the brand that is craft beer more than competing directly with one another.”

In the early days, it was a struggle to comply with input requirements of the Brewery License. For example, you could buy grain grown in New York, but there were no maltsters. A maltster in Massachusetts was found who agreed to segregate the New York grain and malt it separately so that brewers could comply with their license requirements. By the time SSKB opened, there were seven maltsters in New York State.

The growth of the craft beer industry in New York has led to a boom in related industries in the state – e.g., the reemergence of hop agriculture, maltsters, label printing and canning facilities, even brew house equipment. In fact, SSKB has the first brew house (Serial #001) from Fronhofer Design, a former manufacturer of dairy equipment that made the switch to producing stainless steel brew systems. The Fronhofer brew house has a closed thermal fluid heating system which is very energy efficient.

Matt and Eric returned repeatedly to the depth of the relationships they’ve developed in the industry and especially within the network in New York State. The maltster for their Killer Cream Ale, for example, is Hudson Valley Malt in Germantown, which uses the traditional method of floor malting. It’s very labor intensive and all done by hand, with a capacity of only 2,000 pounds of grain on the floor at any one time. The hops for their Charlotte the ESB are grown by Chimney Bluffs Hoppery in Wolcott which, with 32 acres, is the largest hop grower in the state.

The Cornell Cooperative is an invaluable resource to hop growers and grain farmers, and a partner in their efforts. Eric recounted that at a recent conference of the New York Brewers Association, he and Matt, two of their maltsters, a hop farmer and a scientist from the Cornell Cooperative were all talking about the future of grain in New York State, what the Cooperative is doing to address the impact of climate change, and how they can continue to provide grain with the protein content needed to produce the quality of beer they desire.

Eric also related that the hop industry had largely died out in New York State after Prohibition and gravitated to the West Coast. Hop agriculture has been reintroduced to the state on the heels of the Farm Brewery License but, since hops are patented, the state has a lot of catching up to do. The Cornell Cooperative is doing an incredible job in reintroducing hops with indigenous profiles that can prosper here, and they’re also taking into account climate change and the flavor profiles that brewers want.

The beer industry in New York State accounts for 20,000 jobs and an economic impact of $5.4 billion, eclipsing both the state’s wine and distillery industries. Growth in the craft beer industry is equally impressive. In 2011, craft breweries produced 500,000 barrels of beer. By 2021 that figure had grown to 1.2 million barrels of beer.

Matt referred to the concept of local as the Brewery’s “north star” – the importance of supporting local ingredients, local growers and sourcing as local as possible in every aspect of their production.

The afternoon was enlivened with four refreshing SSKB beer tastings:

* Killer Cream Ale: Cream ale is a style of beer that developed in New York State, so it’s fitting that this is the tap room’s best seller. Its name derives from the creamy head that forms during the fermentation process, and it has an alcohol-by-volume (ABV) content of 4.9%.
* Charlotte the ESB (Extra Special Bitter): This is a darker beer with a slightly higher ABV of 5.9%. Matt modeled this beer on the color, ABV and flavor profile of Fuller’s ESB in the United Kingdom – but with New York State ingredients.
* Beers With Names That Are Now Poetry: With an ABV of 3.5%, this is the lightest beer Matt has ever made. Similar to table beers that are produced in the farming regions of France and Belgium, Beers With Names That Are Now Poetry is designed to complement food and has a citrusy flavor.
* Sing Sing Killsner: This is a pilsner with an ABV of 5.2%. Pilsners can take up to three months to brew, and the result is an incredibly clean beer that can’t hide flaws in any of its ingredients. Matt had to wait an entire season for the hops for this beer – a variety called Vojvodina that was originally grown in Yugoslavia. The hops have a slightly cedar and smoky character.

There was a lively Q & A throughout the afternoon, some eager shopping in the tap room for cans to take home (the only place where Sing Sing Kill Beers can be purchased), and delicious snacks provided by Hospitality Chair **Julie Henkin.**

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Sheila Crespi*

*Secretary*