

COMPANY SPOTLIGHT

# Interview with Peter Glendinning, Research Agronomist with the Charles Faram Hop Development Programme

CHARLES FARAM  
HOP VARIETIES



**Q** Tell us a little about you and your role with the Charles Faram Hop Development Programme.

**A** I am a research agronomist and was previously with the Ministry of Agriculture and then a technical adviser to the British Hop Association for 30 years, mainly in pest and disease control. PGhops has joined forces with Charles Faram Hop Merchants to develop new hop varieties. We are headquartered in Herefordshire, in the western Midlands of England, famous as a hop growing region.

**Q** What role does Charles Faram play in the beer industry?

**A** The aim of Charles Faram Hop Developments is to provide brewers with a range of new hop varieties, which can be used to support novel tastes and character in new beers. Since 1865, Charles Faram has built its business on being close to brewers and innovation.

The Charles Faram Hop Development Programme very much relies upon close relationships with brewers, who are directly involved in selecting new hop aromas, trialing them from the outset, and steering the selection process. We run annual “rub and sniff” sessions—“AromaFests”, as we call them—to draw upon the enthusiasm and sensory perception of brewers. This has enabled us to select new varieties Ollicana, Godiva, and Harlequin, which have already attracted the attention of a wide range of brewers worldwide.

Almost as soon as we started the Charles Faram Hop Development Programme, we demonstrated that punchy fruity aromas could indeed be grown in England’s maritime climate. Our gentle climate has long been renowned for growing hops with “noble” aromas, such as Fuggle and East Kent Golding, so we saw no reason why we shouldn’t find both these characteristics together in a new British variety. Combining our rigorous selection procedures with successive generations of crosses of male and female plants, we have seen significant increases in cone density, resin and oil content, and aroma impact and complexity.

We have since set up breeding stations for selecting new hop varieties in both mainland Europe and the United States, and we now have several strains from which to start selecting new varieties.

In addition to resin, oil, aroma, and the usual agronomic necessities, we actively seek out a plant’s natural “tolerance” to disease, as opposed to relying on genetic resistance, which can be all too short-lived. Hops are a monoculture and hence

very susceptible to diseases such as powdery and downy mildew and Verticillium wilt. These diseases mutate and adapt to overcome resistance. We are looking for “tolerance” to powdery and downy mildew and for resistance to Verticillium wilt. New varieties must demonstrate all three traits to be a commercial success in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, we do see some genetic antagonism between two different properties in a hop. For instance, resistance to wilt disease appears to be antagonistic to high alpha content, which places varieties like Pilgrim from Wye Hops on a pedestal and gives us an excellent family to work with.

**Q** What kind of trends are you seeing in the beer industry that may be moving the industry as a whole in a different direction than where it has been?

**A** Although there will always be a natural turnover as new varieties supersede others, we believe there will always be a strong demand for desirable niche hops, such as East Kent Golding or Riwaka, which although low-yielding and difficult to grow have fantastic brewing properties appreciated by brewers around the world. Such varieties will continue to have a place in the commercial yards, even as new varieties come on stage.

**Q** How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected Charles Faram Hop Developments? How have your priorities shifted, and what are your top priorities for 2021?

**A** The effect of Covid-19 was profound and immediate! Our trusty team of workers all had to “shield” at home, leaving all the glasshouse and garden work last year to my wife and me.

Hop development is a long process. Our priorities haven’t changed, as the goals of the project remain the same. On a daily basis, keeping our teams safe whilst continuing to progress has been our focus.

Disease resistance and aroma/flavor remain our top priorities. The crosses we made last year will be planted this year and then assessed this year and next. We have taken another step forward and will be planting more seed, making more selections, and in the summer making even more crosses.

**Q** What is the best way for someone to connect with your team?

**A** Please contact Chris Hudson of Charles Faram Inc. for more information at [chrishudson@charlesfaram.com](mailto:chrishudson@charlesfaram.com).