

What a belter!

"It's a true dual-use variety for brewing and distilling without compromise, meaning it's consistent and flexible."

PAUL BURY

Developed from scratch using a new breeding programme, Belter is a malting barley variety that promises to be exceptional, whether it's grown for brewing or distilling. *CPM* finds out what makes this 'true' dual-purpose variety out-spar its peers.

By Janine Adamson

With full approval for brewing from the Malting Barley Committee, as well as claiming the top spot in its category on the AHDB Spring Barley Recommended List, it's undoubtedly a strong start for Belter.

And according to Secobra's breeder Paul Bury, while Belter is the company's first 'big' variety launch in the UK, it's already packing a punch across all key attributes. "Belter is a consistently high yielding dual-purpose variety with improved grain quality, a comprehensive disease package, stiff straw and an excellent malting profile for both brewing and distilling.

"During the past five years of its development, Belter has performed reliably in the field and in the lab, with consistently high yields across all regions, so proving itself to be a highly adaptable variety. In fact, based on RL yield data during that period, Belter wasn't outperformed by any brewing, distilling or dual-purpose variety. It

offers growers and end users a real step-up in performance," he says.

Scrutinising the variety in more detail, Paul highlights some key RL numbers. "Scoring 104 for treated yield in the UK and 89 for untreated, is why Belter ranks top for yield. It performs consistently across all regions: East (104), West (105) and North (104), despite the challenging, highly variable conditions experienced during the trial periods.

"This is also backed by solid agronomics: 7 for lodging resistance, 8 for brackling resistance, 8 for mildew, 5 for brown rust, 6 for rhynchosporium and 7 for net blotch. It has no obvious weak points," he comments.

However, with quality attributes critical in the malting sphere, what's given Belter the edge to ultimately result in its MBC approval? Paul points out that the variety delivers on grain quality, notably improved specific weight (68.4kg/hl) and lower screenings than competitor varieties.

Then in brewing trials, Belter has presented high hot water extract (315 l/kg), good fermentability, and optimum enzyme levels for brewing and export requirements. "Furthermore, Belter's predicted spirit yield is 437.4 laa/t with an acceptable nitrogen content.

"It's a true dual-use variety for brewing and distilling without compromise, meaning it's consistent and flexible,"



Top performer

Belter is the only viable new malting barley moving through 2026, developed by a breeder that really supports the sector, suggests Secobra's Paul Bury.

Spring barley **VARIETIES**



Standing out

Agrii's Colin Patrick believes Belter's consistency could make it a compelling contender to work alongside the current market-leader.

suggests Paul. "As we see it, it's the only viable new malting barley as we move through 2026, developed by a breeder that really supports the sector."

Agrii trials manager, Colin Patrick, agrees that Belter is an attractive proposition, raising that the agronomy company has trialled it across a range of different locations since 2022, which is key when a variety is being pitched as dual-purpose.

He believes that Belter's consistency could make it a compelling contender to work alongside the current market-leader. "This would spread the risk more evenly rather than relying on a sole variety and its associated genetics.

"Equally, as the ag chem toolbox continues to dwindle, varieties must offer strong agronomic packages and decent untreated yields. So regardless, due to our confidence in Belter, it's definitely an option we'll be recommending to growers."

According to Crisp Malt's Dr David Griggs, current industry demand lies in dual-purpose type barleys. "The industry is looking for varieties that will stick around for a while, so they have to deliver consistent results," he says.

David adds that another factor growing in importance is environmental impact. "Priorities are changing and shifting. As such, varieties that offer lower emissions through improved NUE will become increasingly attractive, the same for those with good untreated yields

that perform in low-input systems."

In terms of how Belter has been performing on-farm, East Lothian grower Natasha Findlay thought 'why not' when offered a trial of the variety. Natasha, who manages around 265ha at Pitcox Farm in Dunbar with her mother and sister, says with just 16ha of spring barley in the 2025 rotation, she perceived it as low risk.

"We have a fairly standard rotation comprising winter barley, winter wheat, oilseed rape, peas and spring barley; historically this has been a good malting barley area.

"We might have been a little more cautious about trying something new on one of our bigger fields, but it was a relatively small spring barley year in the rotation so thought we'd

give it a go," continues Natasha.

Belter was drilled on 12 March 2025 into medium loam soils that had been ploughed during the winter. P&K were applied at variable rates based on soil mapping, plus two applications of Amidas (40%N +14% SO₃) at 150kg/ha on 14 March and 8 April. The crop also received a full agronomy package including biostimulants, herbicides and fungicides.

Despite a long dry spell post-drilling with no significant rainfall until late May, Belter was one of the best crops on the farm, highlights Natasha. It was then combined on 13 August, yielding 3.5t/ac (8.6t/ha) and producing a bright sample in the intake pit.

"It was a good, thick, crop, with

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Data Source: AHDB Recommended List for Spring Oats 2025/26

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VARIETIES Spring barley



Leap of faith

East Lothian grower, Natasha Findlay, thought 'why not' when offered a trial of Belter.

fantastic straw," reflects Natasha. "We do a muck-for-straw swap with a neighbouring pig farm and the straw yield was really good, it certainly did a lot better than the winter barley.

"I'm pleased with how it's done yield- and quality-wise, especially in a very dry year, it would be interesting to see what it does in better conditions. It also passed all malting specifications with flying colours and the grain nitrogen remained low in a year where there were a lot of high nitrogens locally."

For this season, Natasha adds that the farm has a larger area of spring barley and hopes some of this will be Belter. "Put it this way, if someone asked if I wanted to it grow again versus the current market leader, I'd say yes." ●

Landing with impact

Secobra might be new player in the UK, but the breeder is striving to make an impact in malting barley

By the industry, for the industry, is Secobra's mantra. Arguably, that's a worthy strapline given the breeder's shareholders include maltsters, brewers and distributors.

Consequently, the company's aim is to launch varieties that address supply chain demands, explains commercial manager, Tom Barker. "Our ambition is to truly lead the way in malting barley," he says.

As for the company's newest launch – Belter – the variety's journey began back in 2017 when the team sought to establish a UK-focused breeding programme from scratch. While this could have been perceived as a challenge, with no genetics to take forward, it actually meant a starting point that was the best it could be, suggests spring barley breeder, Will Pillinger.

"We could begin our UK journey with a modern, science-based approach to breeding that was fit for the 21st century," he adds.

By 2018, what was to become Belter had been crossed in the UK, and the breeding programme was officially launched to the industry. After much work – from field assessments and lab analysis, to developing disease resistance and trait discovery – Belter became a reality.

Will explains that during this time, not only was a larger UK team created, but Secobra also established a dual-breeding location, with sites in the North and the East. "This was all done to establish a modern, competitive new breeding programme within just a few years," he concludes.

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