UK's First Hydroponic Hop Farm Expands to Mid Wales

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Since the craft beer boom, the demand for hops has exploded. At one point, the average homebrewer was faced with a limited choice of hops as craft and commercial breweries were first in line to claim the pick of the lot. One beer lover decided to do something about it. But not in the way you would expect. Traditionally, hops are grown in fields, taking up vast areas of land. Gareth Davies, Founder and Director of Dark Farm grows his hops in pots, indoors, using hydroponic growing methods - normally used for crops like salad leaves and herbs rather than a plant that can reach 7.5 m (25ft) in height.

Believed to be first indoor hop yard in whole UK, Dark Farm offers a quarterly hop subscription to homebrewers, and have recently relocated to a disused warehouse near Lampeter in mid Wales. They are out to prove that the benefits of hydroponics can revolutionise hop farming. ‘Growing hops in a controlled environment and adjusting the nutrient feed according to their growing cycle saves a great deal of water,’ says Davies. ‘Growing indoors also protects the hops from pests and diseases. We don’t use any pesticides or fungicides on our hops. And the feed we give them is organic.’ Dark Farm currently have around 400 hop plants, made up of 12 different varieties.

Being able to regulate the hops’ water supply is a great advantage during these times when we’re going from prolonged dry spells to extremely rainy periods. Growing hops this way has being successfully done in the US for several years, and it’s estimated that this method of growing can produce the same yield using one tenth of the area, compared to traditional methods.

Davies, whose background is in web development rather than farming, launched his business in Devon in 2017. Now Davies and his wife, who grew up in Carmarthenshire, have returned to Wales to continue their journey and build on their experience. ‘Homebrewing is becoming more and more popular, especially since lockdown,’ says Davies, ‘We’ve been having to supplement our hop subscription service with hops grown on other farms to keep up with demand. Our vision is to supply our members with hops grown entirely on our indoor farm - apart from certain varieties which we can’t produce ourselves.’

As well as hops, Dark Farm sell homebrewing equipment. They also publish the homebrewing magazine, MASHED!, providing part-time employment for Davies’ wife, Yohanna, a writer and graphic designer. Gareth has a clear vision of further expanding operations to provide employment for more local people, as well as acting as a hub to inspire other rural and urban enterprises to embrace sustainability alongside community and business.

The Dark Farm Hop Club subscription costs £60 a year and includes 500g of hops, four issues of MASHED! Magazine, a screen printed T-shirt and a 10% member discount on every purchase of homebrew equipment. Join today: www.darkfarm.co.uk
Follow on social media: @darkfarmhops

— ENDS --

ABOUT DARK FARM

Dark Farm is a small hydroponic hop farm based near Lampeter, Ceredigion, where they grow twelve varieties of hops, exclusively for homebrewers. They also specialise in high quality homebrewing equipment to help people create and pour that perfect pint. In 2019 they launched their quarterly printed magazine, MASHED!. Unsurprisingly, they are huge fans of great beer.

NOTES TO EDITORS

High res & low res images can be found here: https://bit.ly/3AbSE2z

For more information, images, or to arrange a visit to the hop farm, contact:

Yohanna Best, Dark Farm / MASHED! Magazine:
yo@mashedmagazine.com | Tel: 01392 58 0700

Media:











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Scan Me:

Company Contact:

Dark Farm

T. 01392 58 0700
E. yo@mashedmagazine.com
W. https://www.darkfarm.co.uk

Additional Contact(s):
Yohanna Best: yo@mashedmagazine.com

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