

A Menu From Around the World

- 10 New Menu Items
- Breakfast & Lunch
- Authentic Flavors
- Exceptional Service!

ROOTS
CATERING & RESTAURANT

Roots Chicken Bowl

3221 ESPLANADE | 530.891.4500 | MON-FRI 8AM-2PM SUN 8AM-1PM

The Pita Pit

We Deliver to Your Door in Minutes!

GRUBHUB UBER eats

BREAKFAST • LUNCH • DINNER

240 Broadway St. Chico, CA | 530.899.2847 | www.pitapitusa.com

DIAMOND STEAKHOUSE
A Cut Above

GRADUATION BRUNCH BUFFET

FRI MAY 17, SAT MAY 18 & SUN MAY 19

8AM - 2PM

CALL 530-895-1515 FOR RESERVATIONS

220 W 4TH ST DOWNTOWN CHICO

WWW.DIAMONDSTEAKHOUSECHICO.COM

CHOW

Where are the organic beers?

Brewers offer few options, and drinkers don't seem to care



Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.'s Estate Homegrown series features some of the few organic options in the beer aisle.
PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

About 10 years ago, organic brewer Ted Vivatson made a delivery to a small organic grocery store in Davis. As he says he sometimes does, he took the opportunity to observe customers browsing the beer aisle. He recalls seeing a young woman carrying a basket filled with organic produce and organic packaged foods step up to the wall of craft beer bottles.

by
Alastair Bland

"My beer was right in front of her, but she took a six-pack of Sierra Nevada," says Vivatson, who helped establish Eel River Brewing Co., in Fortuna, in 1994. He says he asked the woman why, since she clearly preferred organic foods, she had bought a non-organic beer when an organic option was immediately available. "And what she said has stuck with me ever since—she said, 'Well, I know that what I'm buying now is bad for me anyway,'" he recalls.

That, in a few words, could be one explanation for the near absence of organic beer from the otherwise thriving craft beer industry. Of the 7,000-plus breweries in the United States, just a handful—a dozen or so, near as I can tell—make only organic beer, and one of the best known examples, Bison

Brewing, in Berkeley, folded last year after 29 years in business.

There are many breweries that make some organic beers—those brewed with 95 percent organic ingredients, including only organic hops—but they are a small percentage of each brewery's total production. For example, Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. grows organic ingredients on its premises, and the brewery's Estate Homegrown ales are certified organic. Deschutes also makes an organic beer—its Green Lakes Organic Ale.

The beer industry is so sparsely populated with all-organic breweries, in fact, that the Brewers Association, which tracks so many aspects of the industry's growth and trends, isn't even counting. Bart Watson, the association's chief economist, says there never has been enough demand from brewers for organic hops to generate a supply, and without readily available organic hops, brewers who may consider making organic beer simply can't.

"It's kind of a chicken and egg process," he said via email.

Few people, it seems, are angry enough about all this. In fact, even in the wealthy Bay Area, consumers seem more concerned with saving a buck here and a couple of bucks there than with buying

healthier, safer beer. Daniel Del Grande, founder of Bison Brewing, learned this the hard way when he closed down last year. He says consumers weren't willing to pay the extra cash that it takes to make beer with the esteemed USDA Organic label.

"People just wouldn't pay an extra 50 cents a six-pack for organic, much less the \$1 it cost me," he wrote via email.

When Whole Foods Markets stopped carrying his beer, "I just gave up," he said.

My take on all this? People who buy organic produce when possible still happily buy beer made from conventionally farmed ingredients because of a mind-trick they are playing on themselves. Specifically, when they buy a relatively pricey craft beer rather than a cheaper mainstream brand, like Budweiser or Coors, they feel they have already made the "right" choice, the "responsible" and "sustainable" and "ethical" choice—the same way they feel they have made the right purchase by buying organic foods instead of conventional.

So, they go happily home with their organic salad makings and their craft beer, thinking that the one is the other's equal counterpart, even if the beer is not organic. □