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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Barley Groups Meet

The National Barley Growers Association (NBGA) and American Malting Barley Association (AMBA) were both in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the week of June 22nd for meetings of their respective Boards of Directors. After these meetings, AMBA and NBGA joined together for lunch and informal discussion. Brewers and maltsters began the dialogue noting that despite the economic downturn, US domestic beer sales have remained relatively stable. Imported beer sales on the other hand have declined significantly. Many other areas of the world have not fared as well and beer consumption is down significantly, which has impacted US malt exports. The conversation then shifted to malting barley production and variety development.

Everyone was concerned about declining US barley acreage. Growers noted that there is a need for the release and industry acceptance of new varieties with improved agronomic characters on a regular basis for barley to compete effectively for acreage seeded to other crops. Mitigating the risks of growing barley was another common theme to reverse the acreage trend. Some thought that contracting malting barley acreage has been important in this regard, but this was not the only avenue. Improvements to crop insurance would also make barley more attractive to plant as would new varieties that maintain quality under stressful growing conditions.

Industry representatives noted that there have been a number of new malting barley varieties with improved agronomics, evaluated by industry, rated satisfactory for quality, and released in the last few years and a record number of new lines being evaluated in the AMBA quality evaluation program. One new barley variety, Charles, is the first winter malting barley recommended by AMBA and industry indicated that it has increased its funding and efforts to develop more winter barley varieties. Growers indicated that new winter varieties with adequate winter hardiness would help maintain acres in some areas and open up other areas to malting barley production.

The meeting concluded with participants indicating how important it was that growers and the industry have forums such as this to communicate their concerns and their desires for a productive malting barley industry. Doug Eden, Chairman of AMBA's Board of Directors, noted that "This was an outstanding way to bring the barley to beer chain together... I can only say it (the meeting) was positive." David Henderson is the President of the NBGA Board of Directors he stated that "This was a tremendous opportunity for growers and industry to voice mutual concerns on maintaining an abundant, high quality and home grown supply of barley."