



## New conversion process turns brewer's waste into liquid nutrient to grow beer yeast

30 Aug 2017 --- A new waste-to-nutrient technology could prove to be a big breakthrough for the beer industry as scientists have discovered a new process that transforms spent brewery grains, that are usually discarded, into a valuable product that can grow beer yeast.

Scientists from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) are the brains behind the new process and the teams upcycled liquid nutrient could have major impacts on the brewing industry.

And now Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) in Singapore is interested in taking the technology further and is in talks with scientists in how to become more sustainable and reduce its waste footprint.

### Upcycling spent grains

In beer making, yeast is the key ingredient for fermentation, a process where sugars from the grains are converted into alcohol – and the beer brewing process needs very large amounts of yeast.

Spent grain amounts to as much as 85 percent of a brewery's waste. This is of little value, so the discarded grain is often used as compost or for animal feed.

Innovative approaches to extract value and reuse these discards are actively sought by the beer industry.

Professor William Chen, Director of NTU's Food Science and Technology Programme, who is leading the research, said the new conversion process turns brewer's waste into a valuable liquid nutrient, as similar commercial liquid nutrients are sold for US\$30 per liter.

In comparison, the team's upcycled liquid nutrient is produced at only a fraction of the cost.

This waste-to-nutrient technology took Prof. Chen and his researcher, Sachindra Cooray, a PhD student from NTU's Interdisciplinary Graduate School, two years to develop.

The innovation has drawn the interest of several international beverage companies, including Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) in Singapore.

Prof. Chen is now in talks with several companies to license or commercialize the proprietary technology.

"We have developed a way to use food-grade microorganisms to convert the spent grains into basic nutrients that can be easily consumed by the yeast," explains Prof. Chen.

"About 85 percent of the waste in brewing beer can now be turned into a valuable resource, helping breweries to reduce waste and production cost while becoming more self-sustainable."

Associate Professor Xu Rong, Interim Chair of the School of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering, said the burgeoning global population increasingly strains conventional food sources, so there is a need to innovate new foods and processes to alleviate the increasing demand.

"Discovering new uses for different types of natural food grade microbes in waste-to-nutrient technology is the latest breakthrough by NTU chemical and bioengineers, which can help to address the food security issues faced by the world presently," Assoc Prof. Xu said.

"By upcycling waste to usable nutrients, conventional resources used to grow yeast can now be diverted into the production of wholesome foods," she added.

Over 193 billion liters of beer are produced annually worldwide, which is enough to fill 77,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools, generating some 39 million tons of spent grain. For every five liters of beer produced, one kilogram of spent grain is created.

Spent grains donated by APB were used in this research project.

Mitchell Leow, Head of Corporate Affairs at APB Singapore says: "This research is a testament to how science and innovation enable companies to find novel ways to be more sustainable in their operations."

“Sustainability is a business priority, especially for a large-scale commercial brewery like APB Singapore. We take great efforts to reduce our waste footprint, through such circular processes that ensure materials like spent grain, glass bottles, and even wastewater are repurposed and not simply discarded.”

**NTU's up cycling process**

When grains such as barley or hops are fermented by yeast, the grain's sugars, protein and nutrients will be stripped, leaving behind plant fibers known as lignin.

While lignin is tough and generally unusable in food production, certain types of microorganisms are able to break lignin down into smaller, nutritious pieces.

These nutritious pieces can then be mashed and turned into a liquid, which is easily digestible by yeast.

