

New Belgium Brewing Company
Talk about a Business Case for Sustainability!

New Belgium Brewing Company (NBBC) is a regional brewery located in Fort Collins, Colorado, USA. It opened in 1991 after Jeff Lebesch, the brewery's founder, took his homebrewing passion commercial. In 2009, it produced over 582,000 barrels of its various labels.^[1] As of 2010, it was the third-largest craft brewery and seventh-largest overall brewery in the United States. (Wikipedia, 2013)

It has been reported that following a wildfire that broke out in August 2012, Fort Collins city utility has not drawn any water from the Poudre River in Colorado, and has been drawing down reserve water. NBBC including, it has been drawing reserve water to manufacture its beer, as it claims the existence of 6 new compounds that will ruin the flavor of the beer after black ashes from the fire have found its way into the river. (Gazette 2012)

To me, that really brings to light an ethical question, whether it is socially responsible to deplete reserve water to brew a couple extra barrels of beer. Beer is not a necessity while drink water is, and does it really justify the use of reserve water for beer manufacturing during such critical time?

Rather than receiving condemnation, an article featured on the same day, was titled “A Couple of Beers Can Go A Long Way to Save the Colorado River”. (Paddling Life 2012)

In the article, NBBC was credited for spearheading an effort to restore the Colorado River after being named one of the “Most Endangered Rivers in America”, through the establishment of the Save the Colorado River Campaign, which aims at the restoration of the Colorado River. (Paddling Life 2012) I couldn't help but wonder how much has NBBC contributed to the cause of water scarcity in Fort Collins due to its business in the first place.

This is exemplary of all the social and reputational goodwill NBBC has earned through the years from its high profile philanthropic efforts to drive sustainability in the Fort Collins area, albeit through an operation of what is after oftentimes regarded as a ‘sin industry’. It is worth noting that it almost seems to be a ‘common practice’ in brewing industry to participate or drive River rehabilitation projects around the proximity of its manufacturing facilities, and NBBC is no exception here.

Judging from this, it seems to me NBBC's license to operate is unlikely to be threatened anytime soon and the economic value of championing sustainability yields significant intangible value, particularly for the brewing industry.

Reference:

Gazette August 30, 2012 Retrieved on September 20, 2012 from Colorado beer marker monitors water after wildfire <http://www.gazette.com/articles/new-143943-reserve-belgium.htm>

Paddling Life August 30, 2012. Retrieved on September 20, 2012 from <http://paddlinglife.net/article.php?id=616>

Wikipedia, 2013. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Belgium_Brewing_Company

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