

# A CASE STUDY ON MICROBREWERIES IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

**Sustaining Growth and Embracing Change**

December 2023



# INTRODUCTION



In the heart of Canada's southernmost region lies Ontario's Southwest, a destination with a rich agricultural heritage, stunning lakeshores, and a thriving brewery scene. Microbreweries are rapidly emerging not just as a destination feature, but as a cultural expression and as community connectors. With more than 40 breweries operating in the region, each one tells a unique story – one of craftsmanship, innovation, and now, increasingly, sustainability.

As the world works toward a sustainable future, industries in the tourism sector are being challenged to contribute including breweries. Canada has made a commitment to try to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a universal call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity

by 2030. Destination Canada's framework document A Regenerative Approach to Tourism in Canada echoes many of the same goals, calling for a paradigm shift in how tourism shapes communities and the environment and helps us imagine the power of impactful change that tourism brings.

This case study takes you on a tour of three microbreweries in Southwestern Ontario, showcasing their dedication to sustainability. It uncovers each brewery's stories, challenges, and successes to discover their responsible business practices and role in contributing to the destination's trajectory toward a sustainable future, stewarded by the local Regional Tourism Organization, Ontario's Southwest, and their commitment to a three-year destination sustainability strategy and certification by GreenStep.

# THE BREWERIES

Beyond the beverages they create, breweries have the power to influence the local economy. While the challenges they face could feel overwhelming, many breweries in Ontario's Southwest stand as trailblazers for sustainability, addressing these challenges through innovative practices. As we share the perspectives and journeys of Charlotteville Brewery Co., London Brewing Cooperative, and Anderson Craft Ales, we aim to support others navigating their contribution to Canada's shift to regenerative approaches to tourism. These breweries were selected, each with their own distinct identity because of their commitment to their community and the planet.



# Charlotteville Brewery Co.: Nurturing Nature with Each Pint



Situated amidst the lush forests and fertile agricultural soil of Norfolk County, Charlotteville Brewery Co. (CBC) is a quintessential farm brewery that exemplifies the harmony between artisanal creations and environmental stewardship. CBC's founders, Tim Wilson and Melanie Doerksen envisioned a haven where high-quality food and drinks are enjoyed in the natural beauty of the farm. CBC's commitment to sustainability, driven by a deep connection to the land, is reflected in their practices. From cultivating organic hops to collaborating with local NGOs for environmental stewardship, CBC's journey reveals the role of small businesses in shaping regenerative tourism experiences in the region.

# Environmental and Social Integrity at Charlotteville Brewery Co.

1

## Utilize Repurposed Material

CBC reduces waste and minimizes their environmental footprint by being creative with reusing what they can. They've taken a resourceful approach by purchasing old barns and giving them new life. These reclaimed structures have been relocated to their current farm and meticulously retrofitted to create the brewery's infrastructure. The brewery's interior rustic charm is made up of furniture and decor crafted from repurposed materials, extending their sustainability efforts into every detail of their operation. (Action towards SDG 12)

2

## Grow or Purchase Organic Ingredients

They passionately grow organic hops on their family farm. They source organic ingredients from their own garden and collaborate with local farmers to create seasonal beers to ensure not only a high-quality product but also to support the local economy and sustainable farming practices. (Action towards SDG 15)

3

## Pay a Living Wage to Their Team Members

CBC's commitment to sustainability also encompasses the well-being of their team. By providing a living wage, they ensure that their employees can thrive, creating an inclusive and socially responsible workplace. (Action towards SDG 1)

4

## Collaborate on Biodiversity and Conservation

They actively collaborate with NGOs such as ALUS Canada and Carolinian Canada to support conservation, biodiversity, and habitat restoration. Through initiatives like pollinator gardens and wetland projects, they're contributing to the broader ecological health of the region. (Action towards SDG 15)

## London Brewing Cooperative: Crafting Unity, Crafting Change



In the urban setting of London Ontario, London Brewing Cooperative operates with a cooperative model to create a more equitable and democratic approach to business ownership and operation. Rooted in values of local, organic and collaboration, LBC unites its worker-owners in a quest for sustainable excellence. From its inception, LBC has championed ethical brewing practices, supported local organic agriculture, and created a vibrant hub that nurtures social engagement. With each pour, London Brewing Co-op exemplifies how a cooperative spirit can elevate not only the brewery experience but also the community it serves.

# Cooperative Community Engagement at London Brewing Co.

1

## Offer Fulfilling Careers

LBC's cooperative model lies on the principle of worker ownership. This approach ensures that the brewery provides its members with not just jobs but fulfilling careers. By empowering their employees to have a stake in the business, LBC fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, which extends their commitment to sustainability. (Action towards SDG 8)

2

## Support Local Organic Agriculture

They prioritize local and organic ingredients, particularly hops, in their beer production. This choice not only guarantees the use of high-quality ingredients but also supports local organic agriculture, contributing to the overall well-being of the regional farming community. (Action towards SDG 11 & 12)

3

## Divert Waste

They've conducted a waste audit and implemented innovative solutions to reduce their waste. By transforming previously discarded grain bags into garbage bags with a custom-made container, they've managed to reduce their waste output, demonstrating their creative approach to sustainability. (Action towards SDG 12)

4

## Support Charitable Initiatives

LBC's community engagement extends beyond their inclusive social events. They actively collaborate with community groups, such as ReForest London, creating unique beer offerings like the Kolsch Style beer to support important causes. A portion of the sales from these collaborations goes directly to these organizations each month. (Action towards SDG 10, 11 & 17)

## Anderson Craft Ales: Brewing with Innovation in East London



Located in the heart of a revitalizing London, Ontario neighbourhood, Anderson Craft Ales is a family-run establishment that intertwines quality craftsmanship with a strong commitment to sustainability.

Celebrating its seventh year of operation, Gavin Anderson, the owner, keeps prioritizing innovation and embracing sustainable practices to create positive impacts across his community. From partnering with local farmers to diverting waste, this brewery not only produces exceptional beverages but also uplifts the neighborhood through charitable initiatives. Anderson Craft Ales' journey exemplifies the potential of the brewery industry to act as a catalyst for sustainable innovation with the recent installation of carbon capture technology.



# Carbon Neutrality and Collaborative Initiatives at Anderson Craft Ales

1

## Invest in Carbon Capture Technology

The recent acquisition of carbon capture technology marks a significant step toward environmental responsibility and places Anderson Craft Ales at the forefront of environmental sustainability innovation. This technology enables them to capture and reuse carbon which is used in the beer making process to reduce their carbon footprint. (Action towards SDG 9)

2

## Reduce Waste

Anderson Craft Ales has made strides in waste reduction with a focus on diversion of their spent grain to local farms and on reusing materials. They've embraced reusable beer toppers, minimizing their waste output. (Action towards SDG 12)

3

## Implement Social Sustainability Initiatives

They champion community engagement through their "charity of the month" program. Every Thursday night, they donate one dollar from every glass of beer sold to a selected charitable organization. This initiative has not only created a sense of community around their brewery but has also established them as strong community supporters. (Action towards SDG 10, 11 & 17)

4

## Focus on Employee Welfare

The brewery values its employees, offering them a comprehensive benefits package and ensuring they earn a living wage. This commitment to staff welfare is reflected in their low employee turnover rate, demonstrating that when a business invests in its people, it reaps the rewards of a dedicated and satisfied workforce. (Action towards SDG 1)

# HIGHLIGHTS



From the interviews conducted, it appears that the breweries of Ontario's Southwest truly grasp the significance of collaboration and engagement with a diverse spectrum of stakeholders. All three breweries actively involve local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and suppliers in their sustainability journey. For instance, CBC collaborates with local farmers to source organic ingredients, fostering a strong supplier relationship and contributing to the growth of local agriculture.

All three breweries have made significant strides in their sustainability journey, thanks in part to the support offered by various government initiatives. While these resources have played a role in enabling investments in innovative technologies like carbon capture, waste diversion systems, and energy-efficient equipment, it's important to note that the road to sustainability is not solely paved by funding. Rather, it is connected to their deep commitment and dedication to making a positive impact on their communities and the environment.

The three breweries are also very aware of the opportunity they have in raising awareness about sustainability with their customers. While the reality is that many customers visit these establishments for great beer, the breweries can educate and engage with customers about all of the pillars of sustainability. Using blogs, signage, and offering brewery tours to share their initiatives are common tools used by these businesses.



# FUTURE OUTLOOK



While still feeling some of the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic including labor shortages and debt repayments in a challenging economy, these breweries are clearly resilient. They've adapted to changing circumstances, fostering innovation and community support, and will continue to do so in the future.

Emerging trends and technologies promise to shape the future of sustainability for small scale brewers. Innovations like carbon capture technology, electric delivery vehicles, and more efficient brewing equipment are shifting the landscape of this sector. At the same time, consumers are becoming more aware and recognize the power they have in the journey towards a more sustainable future and will likely increasingly seek out businesses that align with their values. Breweries that proactively communicate their sustainability efforts (without \*greenwashing) and embrace transparency will likely thrive in this changing landscape.

*\*Greenwashing is a term used to describe a false, misleading or untrue action or set of claims made by an organization about the positive impact that a company, product or service has on the environment*

# CONCLUSION



In Ontario's Southwest, the microbrewery sector is undergoing a transformation, embracing sustainability as a cornerstone of its identity. Through the experiences of three exceptional breweries, Charlotteville Brewery Co, London Brewing Cooperative and Anderson Craft Ales, this case study has unveiled a journey of environmental stewardship, community engagement, and economic resilience.

It becomes evident that these breweries are not just places to savor a well-crafted brew; they are pillars of hope and beacons of change. Through their businesses' visions and values, they create a path towards a more sustainable future, one where businesses become catalysts for positive transformation.

In the landscape of Destination Canada's framework document A Regenerative Approach to Tourism in

Canada, these breweries embody the vision of tourism as a bridge between people, nature, and communities. They are a testament to the idea that tourism can be a regenerative force, reconnecting people with the environment and nurturing communities.

Sustainability should not merely be a buzzword; instead, it should be a fundamental promise, a commitment, and the guiding light illuminating a path toward a better future for all. The insights gained from these breweries underscore the importance of making sustainability an integral part of business plans, rather than an afterthought. It must be woven into the DNA of an organization, influencing every decision, and standing as a foundational principle. By embracing sustainability, we raise our glasses not only to a brighter future but to one that is more responsible, resilient and fairer for all.