

It's not a 'real bagel' unless it's made in NJ — or has this Bergen company's ingredient

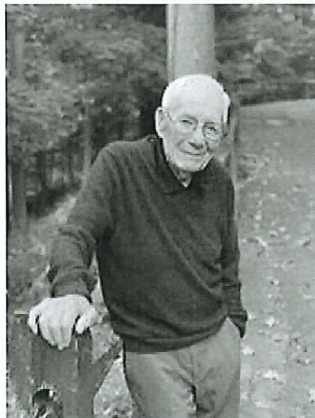
Rebecca King, [NorthJersey.com](#) Published 6:00 a.m. ET Feb. 10, 2020

Bolero Snort, owned by Bob Olson and Scott Wells, has been brewing since 2013; it just didn't have a taproom of its own until now. [NorthJersey.com](#)

[f](#) [T](#) [in](#) [C](#) [E](#) [M](#)
CONNECT TWEET LINKEDIN COMMENT EMAIL MORE

German athletes chugged it to refuel during the 2018 Olympics. Health nuts drink it to feed the good bacteria in their guts. Meatless burger companies use it to make their patties look grilled to perfection.

But before malted barley launched into the stratosphere of trendy health food crazes, it was used to create the crust on loaves of Italian bread and form the chewy skin of bagels.



Ronald Targan, at 94, still comes into work at the company he founded years ago: Malt Products Corporation. (Photo: Courtesy of Malt Products Corporation)

In North Jersey, many bakers were (and still are) buying this goopy, molasses-like substance from the Malt Products Corporation, a family-owned company based in Saddle Brook that has been open since 1957. Malt Products Corporation started as a small, local business, but has since grown to sell barley malt and other extracts like agave, tapioca and corn sweeteners to companies worldwide.

These days, Amy Targan, a South Orange-native, serves as president and owner, though her 94-year-old father, CEO and founder Ronald Targan, still comes into the office every day.

"He took this company from nothing," said Amy. "He started it off and grew it to a major company."

Barley malt is created by germinating grains of barley. When the grains begin to sprout, the natural enzymes are released. Those enzymes, according to Amy, break down starches and turn them into sugar. A careful process of watering and drying partially sprouted grains results in malted barley: a viscous, brown liquid that has the power to give meatless burgers a charred look and bagels their satisfying, shiny crust.

Born in Atlantic City, Ronald opened Malt Products Corporation after graduating college, long before vegan burgers and "good gut health" was even a thought.

"My father would always take me to work with him. I was under the impression that I was co-running the company," said Amy, who became president of the company 15 years ago. "When people ask me when I became involved with Malt Products, I say 'I was born here.'"

Hey, fellow foodie — are you signed up for the *North Jersey Eats* newsletter? Be the first to know about openings and the best local eats — join free today.

Amy recalls her father walking through rows of barley grain in the Saddle Brook factory to see if they had sprouted — sticking his fingers into malt and tasting it to judge if it was ready. (A practice that's no longer necessary due to their "big fancy lab," said Amy.)

Five years ago the Targans opened a second factory in Ohio because in New Jersey they had a hard time disposing of their spent grain — a favorite food of cows and something they can sell to dairy farmers easily in Ohio. Two years ago they closed their original New Jersey factory, but they still keep Malt Products Corporation's headquarters in Saddle Brook.



Barley grains get mashed as part of the process to make barley malt. (Photo: Courtesy of Malt Products Corporation)

Though Malt Products Corporation continues to sell to New Jersey bakeries (for example, Livingston Bagels) much of its business, Amy said, comes from health food companies.

"We've probably sent samples to every big mealless burger company," said Amy. She names Field Roast as one of the plant-based companies they sell to, though many of her clients she can't disclose.