

# Craft brews taking over grocery store shelves

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

It's a job that many might thirst for: official beer taster.

As the wine, beer and spirits buyer for the West Sacramento-based Raley's grocery chain, Curtis Mann's typical workday entails visiting wineries and brew pubs to sip, sample and evaluate various alcoholic beverages. Increasingly, those official tastings are for a special category: craft brews.

"All of our potential growth is in craft (beers)," said Mann, 35, who started with Raley's last August.

As the craft brew scene has exploded over the past decade, both here and nationally, major grocers are increasingly stocking their shelves with more locally brewed beers. In Northern California, larger chains such as Woodland-based Nugget Markets and Pleasanton-based Safeway, as well as mom and pop stores, have devoted staff time – and shelf space – to craft beers.

They're doing so to meet consumer demand. In 2013, U.S. craft beer sales soared more than 17 percent over the prior year to more than 15.3 million barrels, according to the Boulder, Colo.-based Brewers Association. In an overall beer market of \$100 billion in 2013, craft sales totaled \$14.3 billion.

Locally, bottles of Coors and Budweiser are increasingly sharing shelf space with regional brews with quirky names such as Elevation 6225 Pale Ale, a shout-out to Lake Tahoe's elevation, or Rusted Butte Red Ale, named after Sutter Buttes, the Sacramento Valley's mini-mountain range.

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