

Gathering The Grapes Of Gap

BY LISA RISSER

GAP (Lancaster Co.) — Talk grapes to most people and they would speak of Thompson, concord, and red flame. But to Richard and Cheryl Caplan, grapes encompass a world that includes vidal, seyval, chambourain, chancellor, vignole, chardonney, and pinot gris.

These are the grapes they grow; grapes that will end up in a red, white, or rose wine.

Owners of Twin Rivers Winery, still a fledgling business, the Caplans have been dabbling in winemaking on a small scale for several years. Richard began while the couple lived in Berks County several years ago. Much of his current knowledge comes from experimenting with raising various grape varieties and making wines.

They made the move to Lancaster County about five years ago with the intent to grow wine grapes. They purchased a 40-acre former dairy farm that was perfect for their needs. Two streams bedded in deep ravines run through the hilly property and create a cold-air drainage, which protects the tender grapes in the spring. The hills help provide good drainage.

For the past few years, the couple slowly has been increasing the acreage in grapes. Currently 14 out of 22 tillable acres are in grapes with 10 producing this year and an additional two acres will be producing next year. The other acres are rented out to a neighboring farmer who has it planted in soybeans, a nitrogen-placing crop.

"We went to grape growers and winery meetings to decide what grapes to plant," related Cheryl. "Some varieties are more difficult to grow in Pennsylvania. We started with what was currently in demand by wineries and were reasonably safe and would survive winter."

They started with a couple varieties and have slowly expanded into others in successive years. The first grape harvests were sold to area wineries, which would pay any where from \$350 to \$450 per ton for a French hybrid grape.

"We'd been selling grapes for two years when we decided to try and make wine," Richard said. "(With wine making) you can plant 10 acres, get a crop, and retail



Richard Caplan displays a bunch of grapes that will soon be processed into wine.



Winemaker Owen Smith prepares to clean out a storage tank where wine, made later in the day, will ferment for months.



Bees and birds do a lot of damage in vineyards. Cheryl Caplan, who holds up an example of bee damage, estimates that about five tons of grapes were lost this year due to pests, which happen to like the most valuable grapes best of all.

wine at \$125,000 (per crop)."

Richard's eyes light up and his words quicken as he describes the soon-to-be-completed winery. "We'll have a tasting room with a spiral staircase that leads to another wine tasting room. And the entry will have stained glass windows we salvaged from a torn-down church," he described. "There'll be viewing rooms to see the winery and the bottling room, and you can see the level of wine in the tanks."

The winery, housed in the renovated shell of a bank barn, also will feature a barrel room for wine storage, a warehouse, a sales area, and a porch overlooking the vineyards.

Richard also is very excited about the wine-storage tanks. "We're the first winery on the East Coast to use these tanks," he explained. "They're molded of some plastic-type material just for the wine industry. They're just as effective as stainless steel tanks but one third of the cost. You can actually see the wine level in the tanks."

Cheryl, who just earned her law degree, has been doing much of the work in the vineyards. She helps

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