

Winegrower Tastes Benefits Of Research, Hard Work

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"A lot of people think you can only grow grapes in poorer soils," he said. "I realized a lot of grapes are grown in similar ag areas (to Lancaster County)."

Waltz began cultivating Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, two popular varieties used for making red wine. He chose quality, virus-free vines from California and New York to plant in his well-drained silt loam fields. He now has a total of 10 acres in grapes.

The vines are supported by a high-tensile wire "Scott Henry" trellis system, named after the Oregon grape grower who developed it. In this type of trellis, the vines are trained to grow horizontally at two

levels, with the goal of increasing fruit set while maintaining a thin profile of the vines and leaves to allow good air circulation. Rows are spaced eight feet apart.

The young vines come grafted onto rootstock that is best adapted for local growing conditions. The vines normally take three years to produce.

Waltz selected relatively slow-growing rootstock because of the native fertility of his soils, and the vines need minimal fertilization. Waltz applies small amounts of nitrogen in the spring and keeps an eye on micronutrient levels through soil tests.

There are no set guidelines for growing grapes in the area, according to Waltz.

"We went through a lot of trial and error," he said. "There's not any one book telling you how to do it in this part of the country."

Growing wine grapes involves constant learning, talking to other local growers, and traveling, Waltz said. Penn State and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture are also "really working to develop a better industry," along with the Pennsylvania Association of Wine Growers, of which Waltz is a state director.

Weeds are handled with a cultivator designed for running alongside the vine rows. Hilling soil around the grafts in the fall to protect them from freezing

also helps control weeds the following spring. Waltz uses no herbicides.

For insects — mostly the grapeberry moth — he applies pesticide once or twice per season, mainly around the perimeters of the vineyard. Japanese beetles can also be a problem, but Waltz strives to keep spraying to a minimum, in part to protect helpful insects.

"There are so many beneficials that are important," he said.

Waltz applies fungicides on a more regular basis, rotating the chemicals as much as pos-

sible to manage disease resistance. Systemic fungicides have a longer lasting effect.

Marketing is a major part of a successful wine-growing business. It's crucial to research markets, even before starting to grow grapes, and to secure buyers before expanding, according to Waltz.

"If you want to grow grapes, you've got to have a market," he said.

Waltz's goal is "to maximize revenue per acre." He chose Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, French nonhybrid

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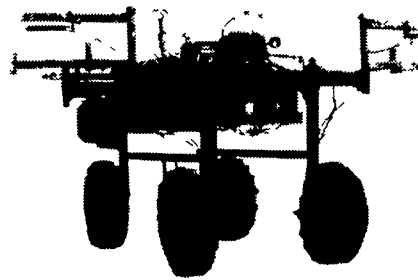
Sam Zook, hired worker, tightens trellis wires in Jan Waltz's vineyards.

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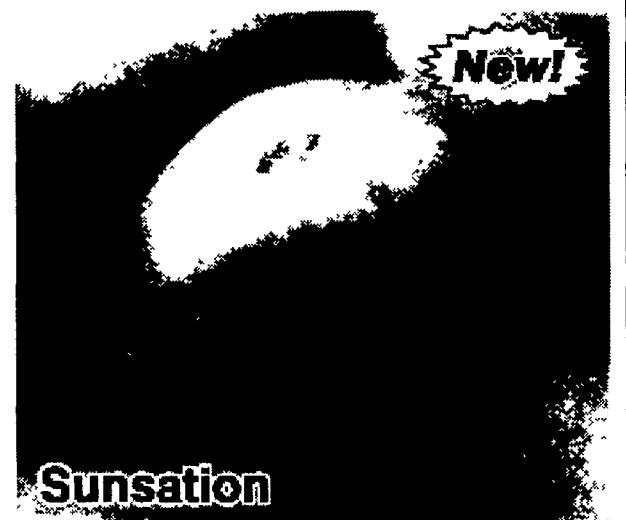
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