

Archives

A grape future for Buffalo's vineyard

By Barb Bachmeier, T-R Staff Writer

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BUFFALO - Last Friday afternoon's sunshine and soft breeze created the perfect setting for wine tasting and a peek at the Red Trail Vineyard outside Buffalo.

It was the vineyard's first annual field day. Brothers Rodney and Steve Hogen, proprietors of the land, teamed up with Greg Kempel, owner of Casselton's Maple River Winery, to show the progress of grapevines planted last spring and to sample North Dakota produced Maple River wine.

"What a better way to spend a Friday afternoon," said Kempel. He started the winery in Casselton two years ago, focusing on using fruits native to North Dakota, such as apples, plums and choke cherries.

Kempel was interested in being able to make wine from grapes grown in North Dakota, and that is where the Hogens of Buffalo come in.

After researching grape hybrids that would be able to survive the northern climate, Rodney enlisted the help of his brother Steve and others to plant their first grapevines last year.

The hybrids are made to withstand temperatures as cold as 35 below. If it gets colder, the tops of the plants may die, but they will still survive as long as the roots are protected.

The first year after planting is when the vines get their roots established. The second year they are pruned to grow one main trunk and adhere to a trellis system. The actual grape production is not ready until the third year.

Last spring the Hogens planted two varieties of grapes: King of the North, a Concord style, and Swenson Red. So far, they seem to be doing well, and should be producing grapes for the winery as early as next summer.



The Hogen brothers stand with their "maintenance crew" in the vineyard. The youngsters, Rodney's neighbors in Buffalo, helped hoe, prune, weed and mow after the vines were planted last year. Next year they will also help with picking the grapes. From left: Steve Hogen, Rodney Hogen, Ryan Fraase and Matthew Fraase. Times-Record photo by Barb Bachmeier

This year the Hogens added two new varieties: St. Pepin, a white grape, and Somerset seedless, the one and only table grape in the vineyard.

Rodney's venture is not stopping with the plants themselves; he decided to take the project a step further. Recently a foundation was laid for a parking lot and building: a tasting room and restaurant are in the works.

"That's what we're working on; to have people come out here and eat at the vineyard," Rodney said.

The restaurant is being planned as a seasonal establishment that can hold around 50 people with additional seating outdoors. Eventually, Rodney hopes to be able to hold events such as weddings at the site.

Although there was a lot of work in the planting, Steve Hogen says the hardest work may be yet to come. Maintenance of the plants is very labor intense, with a lot of pruning, weeding, mowing and eventually picking of the fruit. "The picking might be a lot of work," he said.

Red Trail Vineyards was named for the Red Trail, one of the first trails across Dakota Territory, which used to cross the area.

For more information on Maple River Winery and Red Trail Vineyard, visit www.mapleriverwinery.com.

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