

Over the three years, I have had many informal visits from prospective grape growers who wanted a look at my operation.

In February 2005, I hosted a wine tasting which followed a grape growing seminar at UVM. About 25 people had the chance to taste the wine from some of these grapes, many for the first time.

In late 2005, I contributed a short chapter on these northern grape cultivars to a book on winter hardiness in grapes being edited by Mark Chien, grape extension agent from Penn State, and others.

Results I'm convinced that these grape cultivars represent a new and viable crop for northern areas. These grapes can be successfully and reliably grown in the Champlain Valley, and probably in areas with a slightly colder climate. Clearly, I have voted with a major commitment of my own resources.

But having said that, I must point out that there are obstacles to these grapes being widely and successfully grown. The long interval between planting and the first sales, much less the break-even point, limits production to people with the means and patience to wait these years. I have observed that, in many cases, this means people without farming experience who have to ascend their own learning curve as well. And many new growers, understandably, choose to plant vines on the land they already own. Some of these are not prime grape growing sites.

The relatively high price that grapes command in these new areas is helpful to growers. But even at \$1500/ton (\$.75/pound), I think that it would require several acres, expert management, careful cost control, and imaginative marketing to make grape growing a profitable enterprise.

The value of wine at retail is roughly ten times the value of the grapes that go into it. For this reason (and because of the perceived romance of being a winemaker) most new growers want to open a winery. This may well be the best decision, but it requires, of course, yet more investment, and a whole new set of technical and management skills.

But in spite of these obstacles – which apply to any new grape/wine enterprise in any location -- there certainly appear to be many successful vineyard/winery operations in many of the warmer parts of the country. With these new cultivars, there is no reason it can't happen in the north.

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