

Local grape-drying system helps Canadian winemakers deal with cooler climate

September 12, 2017

By Lilian Schaer



Vineland – A made-in-Ontario grape-drying system is helping Niagara winemakers work with Canada’s shorter growing season and produce more premium wines in the process.

It was those winemakers who approached researchers at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) in 2011 for solutions to enhance their grapes. The answer lay with a centuries-old

grape-drying tradition from Italy called Appassimento that the Vineland team adapted for use in Canada.

“We’ve developed a patented system here at Vineland for drying grapes and reducing their moisture content before making wine,” explains Darren Ward, Vineland’s manager of business planning and commercialization.

The drying process results in less water and more concentrated flavour and sugar in the grapes which, when translated into wine, means greater flavour and aroma complexity.

This creates premium category wines, according to Ward, that range from 100 per cent Appassimento to blends with partial Appassimento content that let winemakers create wine of consistent flavour and quality year after year. “The Appassimento wine allows producers to make more premium wines, which helps increase their profitability,” he says.

Prices start at approximately \$20 for a bottle of Appassimento blend and range to over \$100 for pure Appassimento wine, and although the technology can be used

with both white and red grapes, it is most typically used with reds like cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon.



The technology was launched into the marketplace in 2014 as a fully enclosed system that even small wineries with limited space could use.

Earlier this year, a new modular version of the vertical airflow system was introduced for wineries with existing facilities that didn't need the enclosure, making Appassimento more affordable and accessible for Niagara wineries of any scale. This system is available through Central Fabricating of Beamsville.

Grapes are harvested straight into bins that sit on special pallets and are shrink-wrapped to seal airflow. Forced air from the system flows down through the grapes and is pulled through the bottom, creating very consistent airflow, which is important to ward off mold and ensure consistent drying.

"How long the grapes go through the drying process depends on their initial sugar levels, ripeness, type of grape and the winemaker's desired results – this can be from two weeks to over three months," Ward says.

Various Niagara-region wineries are already using the Appassimento technology, and Ward sees future application in Ontario's other wine areas, as well as Quebec, the Maritimes, and the Finger Lakes region of New York State.

Vineland also offers a drying service for one to two tons of grapes for wineries wanting to simply test out Appassimento before making the investment into the technology.

Vineland's Appassimento program is funded in part by *Growing Forward 2*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

Photo source: Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

<https://www.aginnovationontario.ca/en/local-grape-drying-system-helps-canadian-winemakers-deal-with-cooler-climate/>