

Essay – 644 words

### A WINERY IN BRUCE COUNTY?

Gary Fischer is a farmer. Spend five minutes with him and you know that he is more clearly defined as a man with a passion to learn, which has taken him down many interesting paths. This latest just may be his greatest.

Gary began dairy farming in Carrick Township, following the path of his parents. Dairy farming provided Gary with a thorough understanding of hard work. Allergies drove him out of the barn and into the field where he cultivated acres of strawberries and raspberries for a *u-pick* that lasted eighteen years. Another business, Walker House Fine Wines, a make your own facility, planted a seed that wiggled and fussed in Gary's head. Will grapes grow in Bruce County? Gary discovered they certainly will.

In 2007, Gary began jumping through the obstacle course of developing a winery. That's no easy task in the best of growing conditions. Bigger obstacles than the climate are the rules that come with being licensed to produce wine. After extensive studying and research, Gary found varieties of grape vines that can tolerate Bruce County winters. Two and half years later Carrick Wines is open for business.

I toured the facility at Carrick Wines Open House starting at the Cellar, part of the Fischer home with a lovely separate entrance, set up for tasting and sales. I listened to Gary's daughter, Gillian, describe the three white wines that are available and had a sip or two of each. Delicious. Three apple ciders were light and appealing. Gillian designed the attractive logo and website, and along with her brother Leo and mother Diane this is a family that works together.

Gary took us out to the former equipment repair shed that now looks like a state of the art bottling facility complete with its own laboratory to do the necessary testing. We saw the fascinating equipment that is used to extract the juice from the grapes and filter it and other tasks to get it finally into bottles. Then out to the field to admire the rows of vines and hear the detailed story of growth and harvesting.

It was here in the field that I saw the innovator in Gary, the "but would it work better this way" mentality. He has the vines set up so that the fruit wires that support the grapes are forty-two inches off the ground. In most vineyards these wires are much closer to the ground. Raising them helps reduce the threat of ground frost and back-saving during harvest. Gary explained how the vines grow and the intervention required for the strongest vines to develop.

The first harvest was ready in 2009. Word of the bounty spread; birds came and cleaned out all but approximately two-and-a-half tonnes of grapes, lessons learned the hard way. Netting was later installed. So far no fungicides or insecticides have been used on the vines.

Gary and his family are planting apple trees that resemble more of a vine style of growth and a variety perfected for cider only, a bitter proposition if eaten. Should a crop fail by virtue of weather or disease, a winery is not allowed to bring in grapes to keep production going. Therefore, should that happen, there would be no wine sales. The same is not true for cider production so growing apples diversifies production and spreads the risk out. It is highly unlikely that both crops would be affected and production could continue; another smart move.

The setting is idyllic: a yellow brick home, set back from Highway 9 between Walkerton and Mildmay, with a lovely aerated pond in front and fields of vines surround. Go on an adventure and drop in at Carrick Wines. You won't be disappointed. [www.carrickwines.ca](http://www.carrickwines.ca). If you get a chance to chat with Gary you'll leave the farm more knowledgeable and wondering ... what will he do next.

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