

News

North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis

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Local Farmer Awarded Funding from N.C. Value-Added Cost Share Program

Muscadine Wine from Vineyards on the Scuppernong River

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. – Jack and Grace Bishop, real estate brokers turned vineyard owners in Columbia, N.C., were recipients of an N.C. Value-Added Cost Share (NCVACS) award. The Bishops owned Roanoke Island Realty in Manteo, N.C. when they started looking for investment properties. In the coastal real estate business, the next best thing to oceanfront property is property that is “one street back.” Real estate on the Outer Banks is often out of reach for many who want to be closer to the beach. The Bishops took a geographical step back and determined that the town of Columbia, 30 minutes from Manteo, was “one street back” from the Outer Banks. They purchased 300 acres of land in Columbia with plans for future development. What they didn’t expect was to fall in love with the land and plant vineyards rather than build homes.

Having planted the first vines in 2005 the Bishops are still growing their business, Vineyards on the Scuppernong. They are establishing a customer base through their retail shop, through chain supermarkets and by participating in festival events. The Bishops are one of nine N.C. Value-Added Cost Share (NCVACS) recipients of the first round of funding available through the NCVACS program. NCVACS funding will help reduce the costs of applying for a USDA Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) which may provide additional funding to continue expanding the business.

NCVACS is administered by N.C. MarketReady, a program of N.C. Cooperative Extension and located at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. It is funded by the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission. NCVACS was launched in 2009 to encourage more North Carolina producers to apply for the federal funds and to generate more competitive applications. The Bishop’s award consists of a \$3,500 cost share for grant writing assistance for the VAPG-Planning grant and \$10,000 for USDA matching funds, contingent on receipt of the USDA grant.

When the Bishops started the vineyard there were fewer than 30 wineries in North Carolina. In 2010, there are more than 100 wineries in the state. The muscadine is indigenous to the Tidewater region of North Carolina, believed to have been cultivated from plants growing wild in Tyrrell County along the Scuppernong River where the Bishop’s vineyards are located. Even so, Georgia is providing 70 percent of the muscadines for North Carolina wine production. Jack explains that North Carolina’s soil and climate is actually better suited for muscadine production, so it makes sense that wineries are planting their own vineyards to reduce the cost of buying fruit.

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The Bishops contract the services of Tom Payette, an award-winning winemaker who works as a consultant. They have a goal of maximum production at 5,000 cases. They are content to be small, while producing the best quality wine. On Payette's advice, they regularly test batches of wine for pH, sulfur dioxide, cold stability and heat/protein stability for quality assurance.

Initially the Bishops planned to sell their grapes on the fresh market, but saw more profit potential in producing a value-added product—wine. The primary varieties they grow are 'Noble' for red wines and 'Carlos' for white wines. They also buy blackberry juice to make blackberry wine, but that is the only non-grape wine they produce. They make 10 wines, from dry to sweet, with Simply Scuppernong, a sweet white, being their top seller.

While they offer free tours of the vineyard and the wine-making facility, the vineyards are a couple miles from the retail shop on the tourist thoroughfare, N.C. Highway 64, which leads to the northern Outer Banks. The retail shop is across the street from the Columbia Visitor's Center, which logs 500,000 names each year. The through traffic makes up the majority of their market rather than the local population. They offer free tastings daily and have one additional full-time employee who helps manage the wine shop.

Their wines are available in retail grocers on the Outer Banks and in the Tidewater region. They plan to begin distribution to Raleigh. If the Bishops receive the federal grant, they will use the funding to increase their marketing and advertising and hire employees to support the growth of the business. Their son, David, will be entering the viticulture program at Surry Community College this fall with plans to return to the business.

The Bishops applied for the VAPG in 2008, but learned their application was not eligible for review. "One of the primary goals of the NCVACS program is to assist with the application process by securing qualified grant writers and review professionals to assist the producers, so that applications are not only eligible, but also competitive," said Brittany Whitmire, NCVACS program coordinator.

For more information about Vineyards on the Scuppernong, visit www.vineyardsonthescuppernong.com.

N.C. MarketReady, formerly known as the Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, is a program of N.C. Cooperative Extension, which is an educational outreach of N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University. N.C. MarketReady's multidisciplinary team builds partnerships and educational resources to help North Carolina agriculture be more profitable. N.C. MarketReady is a partner of the Plants for Human Health Institute at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. Learn more at www.ncmarketready.org or www.ces.ncsu.edu.

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