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Getting to know who is making the wine.

## Grapes are Taking Off at Airy Acres

“My grandmother Betty lived in the old farm house that was built in the 1840’s. In 2023 we’re planning on making it into our tasting room and having her picture and maybe a plaque as a dedication to her.” says Noah, son of Pam and Fred Bassette, owners of Airy Acres Vineyard.



Airy Acres Vineyards consists of 14,000 plants on almost 18 acres.

Fred and Pam always knew they were going to inherit the family farm located on the west side of Cayuga Lake off Footes Corners Road in Interlaken NY. “My mother’s family moved into the old farmhouse on Footes Corners in 1918. Originally it was a chicken farm with 12,000 chickens at one time. Back then you could make a decent living by selling chicken eggs. They crop farmed for feed.” Fred tells us. Lemuel Bassette moved to the area from Connecticut in 1810, which makes Noah and his siblings the 8th generation to live in the area.

“We had to decide what we were going to do with the farm knowing we were going to inherit it. About ten years ago we started looking into the possibility that our son-in-law, Nate, who loves

to grow things, could take over the farm and earn a living from it. Initially we thought we were just going to grow and sell grapes and not actually get into the wine business” says Fred. The original plan was that he and Pam would start the vineyard and then after a few years turn it over to their daughter and son-in-law. “We are still working on that plan” says Pam.

Noah tells us “... that the idea of making wine and having a tasting room got started when I came out of the Navy. I came back home and worked at Lamoreaux Landing in the tasting room. I got the “wine bug” and really became interested in wine. From there I went to work at Buttonwood and became the tasting room manager, then I took a job at Damiani Wine Cellars, which is where I am now.” Realizing that there’s more control and profit in making the wine in addition to growing the grapes, the idea of “Airy Acres Vineyard” as a winery was born.



Fred Bassette and son Noah

The winery name comes from the airport created for pleasure by the grandfather on the family farm (FAA Identifier: 6NY3). “Airy Acres Airport” is actually a grass airstrip and hangar on the property that was used by Fred’s father. “We hired Glenn Clark of ‘Crafting a Brand’ in Rochester to design the label. He came out and we walked around and we talked. I wanted aviation linked into the logo, so he came up with the idea of a propeller as the stem of a grape cluster” says Fred.

“In 2014 we did some cleanup and prepared the fields to become vineyards. We planted three acres of Riesling and Gewürztraminer in 2015. Four and a half acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cab Franc were planted in 2016. The following year we put in Lemberger and harvested Riesling. After a few years we planted five acres of Cab Franc, more Lemberger and then Chardonnay in 2020. Our first vintage was 2020 and the last thing we planted was Saperavi and

Rkatsiteli in 2021. “We had a huge harvest in 2021 with lots of great fruit” Fred tells us. About 37 cases of Riesling and 72 cases of Cabernet Franc were produced in the 2020 vintage. Fifteen acres are currently under vine.

Pam tells us that the whole family participates in the business. Although she and Fred are involved in all aspects of running the vineyard and winery, all four children play vital roles: “Our daughter Adele and her husband Nate help a lot in the vineyards. Nate loves to read books about agriculture and loves growing things. His whole backyard is dedicated to growing plants.” The oldest son Dan is a software consultant and maintains the winery’s website, Nate will become the vineyard manager, and their son Joshua, who works for St. John Fisher College in Rochester, helps in the vineyard during the summer when he has off of work. The youngest son Noah, who poured us samples of their excellent wine, says he helps with “... sales, marketing, social media, customer service and representing the winery to the industry.” In addition to their four children and son-in-law, three grandchildren lend helping hands around the vineyard.

Like many of the people in the wine business we’ve spoken to, Fred really appreciates the sense of comradery in the Finger Lakes: “I learned a lot about growing grapes from the Finger Lakes Grape Program at Cornell. My neighbor Robert Ruis (of Sunrise Hill Vineyard) has been a tremendous help with my vineyard, offering advice and loaning equipment. People like Phil Davis of Damiani, Dave Wiemann of Sheldrake Point, Dave Pittard of Buttonwood and Bruce Murray of Boundary Breaks have always been there when I’ve had questions or concerns. I’m really blessed living in an area with such fellowship.”

He continues: “We’re looking at making the 1840 farmhouse that my mother lived in the tasting room for the winery.” “We hope we can do some small amounts of demolition and retrofit the rest, but if not we’re prepared to build a whole new structure. We’re a 3rd generation farm and we’d like to preserve important history if we can.”



Two varieties are currently (as of February 2022) for sale: A 2020 semi-dry Riesling (2% RS and aged 9 month in stainless steel) and a 2020 Cabernet Franc (unfiltered, aged 14 months in French oak). Plans for the near future include the release of an additional Dry Riesling, a classic Gewürztraminer, a bubbly Gewürztraminer, a Lemberger, a Cabernet Franc and a Cabernet Franc Rosé, a red blend of Cabernet Franc and Lemberger, and a Riesling and Gewürztraminer white blend. About 1300 cases in total are expected. Wine can be ordered thru their website and either shipped or picked up in Interlaken. There's plans for a wineclub when the 2021 vintages are released.

Airy Acres Vineyard is located in Interlaken NY.

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You can find them on Facebook and Instagram .




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