Cider Production and Management

Deirdre Birmingham
The Cider Farm:

How we started

Late 2002 - ‘Bought the Land’
-- Clean sheet of paper

Organic & high quality finished product

Land where apples did well

But...Cider was unknown in U.S.
The Cider Farm: 
How we started

Learned of English and French cider varieties

Tannin give complexity, mouthfeel like a wine grape

Wine grapes of apples

But...none commercially available in U.S.
Our First Problem
No trees available commercially

The Solution
Started Small and Scaled

Propagation now a strategic strength?
Our Second Problem

Cider production

Considered building a winery on the farm
- challenging topography, esp. for semi-trucks
- expensive

Looked for a winery in 2011
- made high quality wines
- capacity to do contract ciders
- interest in cider

Considered all options -- including brandy
For many, craftsmanship is a relic from the distant past. But for the few that still embrace it, the rewards are immeasurable.

Crafted without compromise.
Our Second Problem

cider production

🍎 Apple Brandy from 2013 to now

🍎 New farm neighbors – farm to table restaurants

🍎 Introduced us to a Chicago-area winery

🍎 Beta-test of winery & Chicago market

🍎 Both did well!
The Cider Farm:  
One Orchard, two products

- The Cider Farm = The Orchard
  -- English & French Bitter Apples

- Fermented = Cider

- Distilled = Wisconsin Apple Brandy
The Cider Farm:

Ciders

- Kept Kegging equipment only in 2016
- Can’t build a brand via kegs
- Added bottling line in 2017
THE CIDER FARM
SMALL BATCH FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED IN MINERAL POINT, WISC
Horticultural Details

The Evolving Cider Farm

- Silt-loam Soils—began with fallow ground of 3.5 ac, then row crop ground of 14 ac, and later 9 ac.
- Started with M-7s—Early switch to Bud-9s
- Vertical Axe—15’ to 20’ x 8’ staked
  Now Tall Spindle—12’ x 3’-4’ on 4-wire trellis, drip irrigated
- Some disease resistant cultivars (Liberty & Pricilla) in addition to non-disease resistant cider apples
- I focus on tannic apples. Use Hoch Orchards for additional organic tart table apple juice when needed.
Varieties
What to leave in, what to leave out

- faux Ellis Bitter
- Chisel Jersey
- Kingston Black
- Bramley’s Seedling
- Medaille d’Or
- Major
- Tremlett’s Bitter
- Dabinett
- Brown’s Apple
- Somerset Redstreak
Varieties
What to leave in, what to leave out

- real Ellis Bitter
- Chisel Jersey
- (Kingston Black)
- Bramley’s Seedling
- Medaille d’Or
- Major
- Tremlett’s Bitter
- Dabinett  (Brown’s Apple)
- (Somerset Redstreak)
Varieties—What We Have Added
What to leave in, what to leave out

🍎 Liberty on M-26 then Bud-9
🍎 Priscilla on M-26 then Bud-9
🍎 Porter’s Perfection – tannic & tart
🍎 Kronebusch—wild, high tannins & sugars (MN)
🍎 Redflesh varieties
🍎 Mettais – French brandy
🍎 2 American brandy apples
Varieties—Considerations
What to leave in, what to leave out

🍎 Marketing & Product Development

🍎 Horticultural Concerns

🍎 Agricultural Risk Management
Marketing and Product Development

considerations

antiago: Brand is based on our rare apples and being organic

Blends – that feature our apples


Can you make cider as cheaply as beer?
Marketing and Product Development
considerations

🍎 Sell on the farm?
🍎 Distribution – where and how?
    Not everyone wants you
🍎 Direct to Consumer Retail
    We are adding this now
🍎 Bringing production in house
🍎 New but related products?
Horticultural Considerations

What Comes with the Organic territory

- The Cider Farm: N = 1 in Upper Midwest
- Little & confusing information
  Wisconsin is not England or France
- Organic is our choice
- Adds cost—without necessarily a price premium
Horticultural Considerations

What Comes with organic cider apple territory

- Fire blight
- Planting distances and other specs?
- Round-Headed Apple Borer for us
- Labor intensive issues
Agricultural Risk Management

Protecting against nature’s downside

- Irrigation
- Diverse bloom times – e.g., Major
- Fencing
- Insect & disease monitoring