



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Jerry Milbrandt, president and owner of Milbrandt Management, at his new wine bottling plant at Ancient Lakes Wine Co. near George, Wash., on Dec. 26. The largest custom wine bottling operation in the state will start running in January.

# State's largest custom wine bottling plant to open

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

GEORGE, Wash. — The largest custom wine bottling plant in the state will begin operations in mid-to-late January at Ancient Lake Wine Co. in George.

The 60,000-square-foot facility will be capable of bottling 250 bottles of wine per minute, 10,000 cases per day and 2.2 million cases a year, said Brandon Rice, winemaker and facility manager. It will run about 44 weeks per year and is equipped to produce sparkling wines.

That's still just one-fourth to one-third of the capacity of Ste. Michelle Wine Estate's bottling plants in Patterson, Rice said. Those plants almost exclusively bottle Ste. Michelle wines from Ste. Michelle

wine grapes, whereas Ancient Lake Wine Co. produces wine from its grapes and others' to sell to other companies to retail. It has no labels nor retail sales of its own.

Ancient Lake Wine Co. is part of Milbrandt Management, which also includes Milbrandt Evergreen, Milbrandt Vineyards, Wahluke Wine Co. and Desert Farms. Milbrandt is one of the larger wine producers in the state.

Ancient Lake Wine Co. owns 1,500 acres of vineyard in the Quincy-George area, 1,500 acres in Mattawa and sources wine grapes from about 1,000 acres of independent vineyards throughout Eastern Washington.

The new, \$6 million bottling plant has 20,000 square feet for the bottling line and 40,000 square feet for packed

case storage, said Katherine Ryf, Milbrandt Management CEO and vice president. Some 750,000 square feet of packed case storage will be added later, she said.

The first of four phases of the new winery began in 2014 and was finished last spring. The \$10 million phase includes crushing equipment, one 250,000-gallon fermentation tank and 80, 34,000-gallon fermentation tanks all capable of crushing 23,000 tons of wine grapes annually for 3.8 million gallons of wine, Rice said.

The winery handled 15,700 tons of grapes in 2017 and produced about 2.6 million gallons of wine, he said.

"Every year we should have more tonnage and more wine but wine on hand will include carryover from the prior year," he said.

The stainless steel fer-

mentation tanks range up to 40 feet tall and are outside and coated with white, resin-based insulation, 3 to 4 inches thick to keep juice between 55 and 65 degrees, critical for fermentation.

The second phase is the bottling plant and packed case storage. The third phase, to start in 2019, will be another concrete pad for a duplicate set of fermentation tanks to raise total annual capacities to 50,000 tons of grapes and 8 million gallons of wine. A fourth phase will be a 45,000-square-foot barrel room.

Currently, about \$23 million is invested in the total project but when all four phases are done they are expected to total \$46 million and the timing of completion partly depends on demand from industry growth, Ryf said.

# Washington safety agency fines food processor \$92,400

Freeze Pack appeals, denies all violations

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press



Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

A Pasco, Wash., vegetable processor has been fined \$92,400 for five safety violations, including one that led to a worker losing part of a finger, the state Department of Labor and Industries announced.

Freeze Pack, a division of Oregon Potato Co., has appealed the fines to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health within the department. The company denies every violation. It also argues L&I should not have labeled it a "severe violator," an official designation that means more workplace inspections.

"Freeze Pack has been and continues to be committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all employees," company President Frank Tiegs said in an email.

L&I began an investigation after a worker suffered a fractured wrist and partially amputated finger on May 19.

The worker's hand was pulled into conveyor belt rollers as he blew away on-ion debris with an air hose.

As the man worked under the belt, the hose was pulled into the rollers, taking his hand with it, according to L&I. The agency alleges the company didn't follow safety procedures to ensure the belt wouldn't move.

In its appeal, the company says that the rollers must be turning to be cleared of onion debris. Workers are trained to stand more than 3 feet from the belt while using the air hose, the company stated.

The company says the worker, a shift supervisor not trained to clear conveyor belts, got too close. The

nozzle got caught in the rollers. Instead of letting go, the worker tried to yank out the hose, according to the company.

L&I issued a \$52,800 fine for the incident. L&I says it has cited the company four times in the past three years for similar violations. Three times have involved an amputated finger, according to L&I.

The company also was fined \$26,400 for two cases of allegedly not adequately safeguarding moving parts on conveyors. The violations were serious repeat offenses, according to L&I. The company was cited for the same two violations in 2014, the agency stated.

The company argues the exposed parts are not in areas frequented by workers and did not put workers at risk of serious injury or death.

L&I also levied a \$6,600 penalty, alleging the company endangered employees by issuing unsuitable tools. An L&I inspector reported seeing workers equipped with paddles to open and close inoperable gates on conveyor belts. The paddles were too short, so workers walked on conveyor belts, risking falls, to open and close the gates, according to an L&I report.

The company says workers used the paddles to break loose backed-up onions on conveyor belts. The paddles were used to open and close gates temporarily until the automatic gates were fixed, according to the company.

L&I issued another \$6,600 fine, alleging the company didn't have a written plan to control the power supply to equipment. The company says that it did have a plan.

# State commissions help fund U.S. Wheat technician in S. America

Potential demand could double exports

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

The Idaho, Oregon and Washington wheat commissions are helping pay for a new technician to help promote the use of Northwest wheat in South America.

Each commission will

provide \$30,000 per year to U.S. Wheat Associates for five years.

Long-term demand on that continent could potentially double the current demand for Northwest wheat, said Mike Miller, president of U.S. Wheat Associates

and a Ritzville, Wash., farmer. He pointed to "huge" demand in Brazil and potential demand in Chile, Colombia and Peru.

"The South American market has turned into as big a market now as the Pacific Rim-Asian market," said Darren Padgett, board member of the Oregon Wheat Commission and a Sherman

County farmer. Asia buys about 43 percent of U.S. wheat exports, he said, and South and Central America about equal that percentage.

South American customers who have visited the U.S. say they need a technician to determine how to best use wheat from the U.S., and the U.S. needs to have a presence, Miller said.

The goal is to increase sales for all classes of U.S. wheat and grow the market presence.

Padgett said the commissions heard about the need for a technician during a U.S.

Wheat global staff meeting in Colorado last May.

The three state commissions look for projects on which they can cooperate, Padgett said.

Having somebody on site is important if you've got a problem, he said. It could give U.S. wheat an advantage over wheat from such nations as Australia and Canada.

U.S. Wheat is looking for the right fit for the position. The job description is not completely set, Padgett said.

"They're trying not to put themselves in a box too

much if the right person comes along," he said.

Padgett hopes to have a technician in place by the Latin American Wheat Buyers Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in July.

U.S. Wheat will employ the technician and the commissions will provide support for travel, equipment and other needs, he said.

"I'm kind of excited about it — it's a great project the three states are wholeheartedly behind," he said. "I think it's going to do a lot of good and it's a good use of grower dollars."

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