

## Idaho Innovators

# Following a family's dream

James Holesinsky converts Idaho dairy farm into vineyard, winery

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

BUHL, Idaho — Land that once hosted a small family dairy farm now boasts rows of bountiful grapevines and an award-winning winery. The cows have been gone for decades, and the former milking parlor has been transformed into a winery with old-world ambiance.

James Holesinsky's parents stopped milking cows in the late 1970s and went into the dairy chemical business, but his father always wished there was a vineyard on the farm's green pastures.

At 22, Holesinsky made that happen.

Some friends were planting grapes and had leftover vines. Holesinsky was working in the family business, but being an avid gardener and wanting to honor his father's lifelong dream, he took the plunge — planting 1,000 Chardonnay vines.

His dad, other family members and friends helped with the planting — and the vineyard finally became reality.

That same year, 2001, Holesinsky started taking



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press  
James Holesinsky in his vineyard near Buhl, Idaho.

wine-making and viticulture courses online through the University of California-Davis Extension, later earning a winemaking certification through the program.

The next year, he planted 3,000 Syrah, 2,000 Merlot and 200 Port grape vines.

"And the rest is history. We just started making wine every year from then on," he said.

The vineyard expanded again in 2006, adding 2,000 Cabernet Sauvignon and 1,000 Riesling vines. Muscat vines were added in 2007.

But it isn't easy growing grapes so far inland; they need good drainage and good airflow.

"Both are equally important. We learned the hard way," he said.

Most attempts at grow-

ing grapes in the area end in failure because of the frost. It freezes the vines back to the ground every year, he said.

He tried growing grapes on all 14 acres of the farm, but only 6 acres turned out to be suitable for grapes.

He adds to his own harvest by contracting grapes from the Hagerman, Idaho, area and bottles about 700 cases of wine a year.

He prides himself on using French-style wine-making techniques for his red wines — aging on the lees, the dead yeast cells and other particles that remain after fermentation and settle as sediment. He also lets the wine sit in oak barrels for about two years, longer for some wines, before tapping it to the bottle.

"Most people mismanage the lees; you have to make it

### James Holesinsky

**Age:** 39  
**Established:** 2001  
**Location:** Buhl, Idaho  
**Grape acreage:** 6 acres and contracted grapes from nearby vineyards  
**Wines:** Syrah, Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling, Rose, red blends and dessert wines  
**Awards:** Idaho Wine Competition — 2 gold, 2 silver, 3 bronze; Northwest Wine Summit — 2 gold, 1 silver, 5 bronze; Idaho Wine Festival — 1 gold; Denver International Wine Competition — 2 gold; Critics Challenge International Wine Competition — 1 gold; Riverside International Wine Competition — 1 bronze; Savor Northwest Wine Awards — 4 silver  
**Employees:** 1 full time, 1 part time and a few seasonal workers  
**Tours and tastings:** By appointment

on NBC's "Today Show" in mid-August in a segment about food and drink celebrating the eclipse.

"It's been the most successful release of the winery ever," Smallwood said.

The winery produced 112 cases, and it sold out in about three weeks. People from all over the country are still contacting the winery, trying to get their hands on it, he said.

"It's really been surreal. It was the first label I've ever done on a wine bottle, and it hit a home run," he said.

The winery will soon be coming out with a new blend and a new label — Idavine, tied to how popular Idaho wines have become, he said.

The winery already applied for federal label approval and expects to have that certification by mid-October. It will also start marketing wine in pouches, and it prides itself on locally sourcing all its graphic designs and screen printed labels.

Holesinsky also plans to transition back to organic. The vineyard started out certified organic and still grows the grapes organically, but delays in organic inspections were limiting his marketing and he ended up letting go of the certification.

The winery is open for tours and tastings by appointment, and its dessert wines are currently only sold on site.

*The story was first published on Sept. 10, 2017.*

# Farmers strike out on their own with niche opportunities

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — Until he started working on a farm, Alex Bowman-Brown often questioned the value of his previous jobs, which included a variety of occupations.

"I always kind of questioned every job I'd done. Was there really a point to me doing it?" he said.

But then he volunteered at an organic farm about seven years ago and the questions stopped.

"Farming wasn't something I could question the meaning of," said Bowman-Brown, 35. "It's essential. Food is something that everyone needs. It's also a way for me to be a land steward

and do something that benefits the community, and I can't question the value of it."

After working on several organic farms during summers in Montana and Washington, Bowman-Brown moved to the Boise area in 2015 and began working at Peaceful Belly Farm, an organic operation in the Dry Creek Valley just north of Boise.

After a year, he and two other farmworkers employed there decided to start their own operation, Fiddler's Green Farm, a small certified organic farm that grows garlic, flowers and vegetables on 6 acres just down the road from Peaceful Belly.

The farm grew 180 types

### Alex Bowman-Brown

**Occupation:** Co-owner, Fiddler's Green Farm, Dry Creek Valley  
**Age:** 35  
**Born:** Helena, Mont.

of vegetables last year.

"It's a huge, diverse array of mixed vegetables" that requires a spreadsheet to keep track of, Bowman-Brown said.

Their products are sold at

the Boise Farmers' Market, directly to Boise restaurants and at the Boise Co-op. They also have a Community Supported Agriculture program.

Bowman-Brown co-owns the farm with Justin Moore, a Vermont native who has worked on several organic farms around the country, and Davis McDonald, a native Boise resident who has a background in wholesale flower sales.

Nampa farmer Janie Burns, president of the Boise Farmers' Market board of directors, said the three are a great example of young farm-

ers who put in their time on the farm and then struck out on their own when they saw niche opportunities open up.

"I think it's wonderful that a group of young farmers saw a market and are using their professional skills to bring some really beautiful vegetables to the valley," she said. "It's a great example of young people kind of doing their time learning the craft and then striking out with fingers crossed."

Bowman-Brown said the trio felt confident there was a local market to support their dream but admitted that start-

ing their own farm involved a good dose of chance.

"We knew that the market in Boise was pretty open and we knew we could probably sell stuff but we didn't know how well it would work," he said. "It was definitely a big risk."

He said their goal is not necessarily to become bigger but to get better at what they're doing now.

"Instead of getting big, we want to get really dialed in and make it a well-oiled machine," he said.

*This story was first published on Nov. 6, 2017.*



Sean Ellis/Capital Press  
Alex Bowman-Brown sells vegetables to customers at the Boise Farmers' Market Nov. 4. After questioning the value of several previous jobs he had, Bowman-Brown has found his niche as the co-owner of a small organic farm in the foothills north of Boise.

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