



Experimental orchard crafting cider success

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Sometimes, an apple orchard is just what it appears: A place where the owner grows apples, sells them for fruit or juice in the fall, and then repeats the process the following year.

But now and then, an apple orchard is a lesson. What began for 2 Towns Ciderhouse owners as a way to produce the hard-to-find “old world” craft cider apples in their own Corvallis orchard, instead became their 3-acre learning laboratory. Although 2 Towns’ orchard, planted in 2012, produces some fruit for its “Traditions” line of ciders, its most valuable fruit is education, according to Dave Takush, orchard manager and one of the three partners who founded the cidery in 2010.

Takush and his partners planted the orchard hoping to supply craft apples for their own ciders. They quickly outgrew that idea.

Today, instead of counting on production from their own orchard, 2 Towns’ owners have contracted with local orchardists. Their own orchard serves as a place to learn first-hand about challenges to old world apples: the small fruit, the biennial bearing, the new world requirements of trees native to France, England and other old world soils and climates.

Growing these transplanted varieties in the Northwest is so new that there is little back-ground on which to draw, outside recent experience. Oregon State University and Washington State University have established test orchards, but much of the knowledge is collecting in small commercial ventures contracted to grow craft apples for cideries like 2 Towns. The French-style “Cidre Bouche,” for example, uses old world bittersweet cider varieties like Kingston Black, Mi-

chelin, Reine des Pommes, Dabinett and Muscat de Lense, all grown in Oregon.

The 2 Towns Ciderhouse has been a head-rushing success for the Oregon State University and University of Oregon alums who founded it: Takush, Lee Larsen and Aaron Sarnoff-Wood. Their cidery produced just 18,000 gallons in its first full year. In 2018, it is expected to produce over 1 million gallons.

“It’s gone beyond our wildest dreams,” Takush said of their ciders, now distributed in eight western states. It will take about 12 million pounds of apples to produce 2 Towns’ ciders this year.

About a dozen varieties can be found on tap at the Corvallis tasting room and cidery, or on store shelves. Most of 2 Towns’ ciders are not made with old world varieties, apples with high tan-

nins or dry flavors uncommon in apples native or common in the new world, Takush said. Most ciders are made with apples that grow well here: jonagolds, pink ladies, Newtown pippins, golden delicious and popular dessert apples. 2 Towns’ flagship “Bright Cider,” for example, is among those made with local new world apples. It’s balanced, not overly sweet, fruit-forward and easy drinking, Takush said.

“It’s all sourced exclusively from the Northwest,” he said.

Currently, the Northwest is home to about a quarter of the nation’s cider makers, according to Nik Wiman and Aaron Heinrich, OSU orchards specialists. Two years ago, OSU planted about 50 varieties of cider apples in its test orchard. Once it starts producing, the university’s fermentation science students will begin studying the tastes and aromas particular to Oregon craft apples. Washington State University’s test orchards span 200 acres over three sites, some of which is devoted to testing old world cider apples.

ABOVE: 2 Towns Ciderhouse owners, from left, are Lee Larsen, Aaron Sarnoff-Wood and Dave Takush. They expect to see their 7-year-old business produce 1 million gallons of cider this year.

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