



BY DAVE MCINTYRE

Virginia Cider Industry Grows Alongside Wineries

Wine marketing model benefits artisan cider producers

Diane Flynt bristles when someone mentions cider and beer in the same breath. She regards cider as a wine made from apples, pressed once a year after harvest and bottled the next spring, not something to be brewed in a new batch when supplies run low.

Flynt is co-owner, with her husband, Chuck, of Foggy Ridge Cider, nestled in the remote Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, not far above the North Carolina border.

AT A GLANCE

- + Consumer interest in hard cider has motivated big beer companies to get in on the action.
- + Because Virginia cideries are licensed as farm wineries, the Virginia Wine Board is helping to promote the state's cider industry.
- + Six of the state's eight cider producers have tasting rooms to attract wine lovers.
- + There isn't always a match-up between quality wine grape regions and quality cider apple regions

They planted their orchard in 1998 using heirloom apple varieties that had been used for cider production in Colonial times but fallen out of favor once folks started eating apples instead of drinking them. When they put

their first Foggy Ridge ciders on the market in 2005, they ignited an artisan cider movement in Virginia that now reaches across the country. Cider producers even have their own trade show, CiderCON, which launched in 2011 and takes place each year in Chicago.

Consumer interest in hard cider caught the eye of the beer companies, which have moved into the market in a big way. The best-selling brand in the United States today is Angry Orchard, owned by Boston Beer Co. MillerCoors acquired the popular Crispin brand in 2012 and introduced Smith & Forge cider earlier this year, while Anheuser-Busch InBev introduced Stella Artois Cidre to the U.S. market and launched its own domestic brand, Johnny Appleseed, earlier this year. Another macro brand, Woodchuck Cider, is owned by Irish beer giant C&C.

According to Crain's Chicago Business, the beer companies were determined not to let the hard cider bandwagon pass them by the way craft brewing did.

"Cider is a niche in the beverage market," Flynt said. "Artisan cider is an alcove inside a niche."

Just how small an alcove? Carol Miles of Washington State University and Greg Peck of Virginia Tech surveyed 105 producers attending this year's CiderCON and found that 37% produced between 1,000 and 5,000 gallons of cider in 2013, while only about 10% produced more than 50,000 gallons.

Lacking the distribution network of the large beer companies, Flynt had to peddle her ciders the hard way, pouring them for retailers and sommeliers. Foggy Ridge ciders are available along the East Coast, and Flynt has participated in cider-

themed promotions in New York. Earlier this year, she presented Foggy Ridge ciders at the James Beard House paired with a Chinese New Year banquet cooked by star chef Peter Chang.

WINE INDUSTRY ALLIANCE

Along the way, Flynt had help from the Virginia Wine Board, a state-sponsored organization that heavily promotes Virginia's booming wine industry. It was an easy alliance: Virginia licenses cider works as farm wineries, and the Wine Board quickly welcomed and helped promote the growth of Virginia cider. Today, there are eight licensed cider producers in Virginia, with three more in the planning stages, and Flynt serves on the 10-member Wine Board.

"The fact that Virginia cider-

VARIETY COUNTS

"You just can't make great cider with Red Delicious or Granny Smith," said Diane Flynt of Foggy Ridge. Cider apples are more tannic and acidic than "eating" apples, and provide much more complexity to the finished cider. Just as fine wine shouldn't taste "grapey," artisan cider shouldn't taste "apple-y."



Cider apple varieties, such as Tremlett's Bitter, are very different from culinary apples. Photo: Foggy Ridge Cider

Most U.S. apple production long ago concentrated on eating apples. Flynt and other artisanal cider makers search for traditional English varieties or those planted during Colonial times and painstakingly plant new orchards. Foggy Ridge's orchard has varieties that today's supermarket shoppers likely have never heard of, such as Drymock Red, Foxwhelp and Orange Pippin. Flynt obtained her original budwood for Hewe's Virginia Crab apples from Monticello, where Thomas Jefferson grew the variety to make cider. (Early America's most famous oenophile drank more cider than wine.) Flynt also buys Stayman and Newtown Pippin from nearby growers.

The brother-sister team of Chuck and Charlotte Shelton at Albemarle CiderWorks also works to revive traditional cider apple varieties. Their Vintage Virginia Apples Co. grows

about 100 varieties, many of them heirloom, and serves as a nursery for startup growers and cider producers. They are especially fond of Harrison, a variety developed two centuries ago in New Jersey and thought extinct until it was rediscovered in the 1970s.

Albemarle's Jupiter's Legacy is a full-bodied cider blended from 30 varieties of apples and named for Jefferson's slave who was responsible for cider production at Monticello.

For cider producers that don't already have their own orchards, a shortage of cider apples may be brewing. Already in limited supply, the amount of available cider apples will only get smaller as more producers enter the market. Even if higher prices resulting from increased demand compel U.S. farmers to plant more trees, it will take years for new orchards to be developed. — D.M.



Annette Ringwood Boyd of the Virginia Wine Board sees Virginia cider as a natural extension of the state's wines.

ies are licensed as farm wineries is a big factor in their being considered part of our Virginia wine family," said Annette Ringwood Boyd, director of the Virginia Wine Board's marketing office in Richmond. "Cider is fermented fruit juice, and Virginia cideries focus on Virginia-grown fruit, so it's an easy extension of Virginia wines." The Virginia Cider Association, which has sponsored an annual Cider Week each November since 2012, is a subset of the Virginia Wineries Association.

Focusing on the product – cider – rather than the ingredient – apples – also helped Virginia's cider producers reach the market and build their brand, Boyd said.

"The Virginia Apple Board is used to dealing with apples as a commodity, fresh or processed as juice or applesauce," she explained. "But they really don't know cider or federal and state

alcohol control regulations. So this was a natural fit with the Wine Board marketing office and the wineries association."

Foggy Ridge benefited early on by participating in a local wine trail and a cooperative tasting room in Floyd, Va. Several wineries – including Chatham Vineyards, Cardinal Point, Early Mountain and Breaux – sell Foggy Ridge ciders along with their own wines.

Other cideries have followed the winery marketing paradigm. Six of the state's eight producers have tasting rooms to attract tourists and wine lovers. Albemarle CiderWorks, south of Charlottesville, opened in 2009 and hosts an annual harvest festival that attracts more than 2,000 visitors. Blue Bee Cider is Virginia's only urban cidery – and one of few in the country – attracting cider lovers to the Old Manchester district in downtown Richmond.



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During Virginia Cider Week each November, local ciders are featured at restaurants and retail outlets.

Cider Week is the main cooperative marketing effort. Modeled after New York's Cider Week, Virginia's is held the week before Thanksgiving, by proclamation of the governor. Restaurants and retailers are recruited to feature Virginia ciders. Last year's Cider Week included a "cider salon" in Richmond at which the state's producers explained artisan cider production for members of the beverage trade.

Cider Week was sponsored by Whole Foods Market and several regional tourism promotion agencies throughout Virginia, with marketing assistance from the Wine Board marketing office. It included 80 cider-themed events in 50 cities statewide and generated more than 40 articles in media outlets such as The Washington Post and Southern Living, Boyd said. And to keep with modern media metrics, the week generated more than 800,000 "impressions" on various social media platforms.

Along with smart regulations and a thriving cider-friendly wine industry, Virginia also has nature on its side in promoting cider together with wine.

"Quite a few states can grow grapes and apples, but there isn't always a matchup between quality

CIDER SALES GROWTH

In 2012, hard cider represented just 0.3% of the Beer/Cider/Flavored Malt Beverage category, according to Nielsen, but the category has been showing strong growth in the U.S. market. In the 52 weeks ending May 24, 2014, Nielsen reported that cider sales increased 84% by dollar value and grew 87% by volume to reach 9.6 million cases. At that time, cider represented 1% of the Beer/Cider/FMB category.

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While Nielsen includes cider as part of the beer category when tracking sales, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) considers it a wine, and anyone producing cider is required to hold an Internal Revenue Code (IRC) permit.

The TTB definition of cider is as follows:

- + Cider is as a fruit wine made entirely (except for sugar, water or added alcohol) from apples.
- + Hard cider is a type of cider specifically defined in the IRC as a still wine derived primarily from apples or apple concentrate and water, containing no other fruit products.
- + Hard cider contains at least .5% and less than 7% alcohol by volume.

wine grape regions and quality cider apple regions," Flynt said. She cites New York as an example of a state that successfully grows both. "But the most well-known cider apple grower in the country is in New Hampshire, which is not a capital of wine. Washington state grows the most apples in the country, but the production is concentrated in culinary apples."

Expanding that artisanal alcove within the hard cider niche is a slow process, as it takes several years for young apple trees to produce sufficient fruit to support cider production. But Flynt said she's already selling some budwood from her heirloom-variety trees to cider producers in California and other states. She doesn't like the Johnny Appleseed analogy, perhaps because Anheuser-Busch appropriated it for a brand name, but she and other artisanal cider producers are planting the trees and spreading the word of a cider revival.

Dave McIntyre has been *The Washington Post's* weekly wine columnist since October 2008, and has written a wine blog – *Dave McIntyre's WineLine* – since 1999. He is also the co-creator of *Drink Local Wine*, an organization that promotes the growth of local wine industries around the country.

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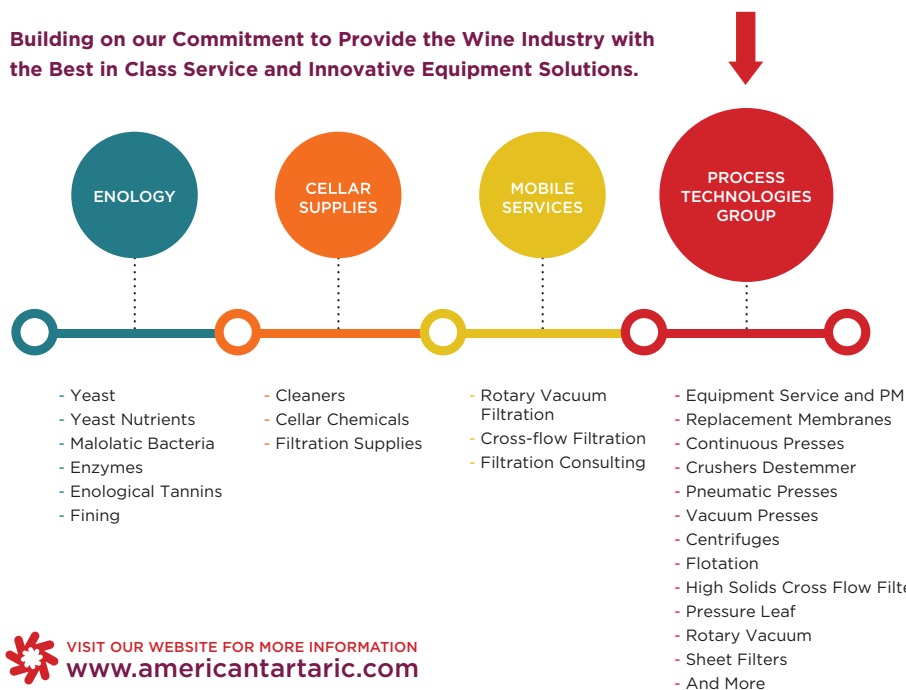
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