

The Next Generation of Farmers Look To Different Commodities

Our next generations of agriculturalists are venturing into non-traditional commodities. One example is Larry Shrawder from Kempton who was born and raised in a traditional farm family. From personal experiences and skills acquired from FFA and agriculture classes, his career began with a number of agriculture related businesses including renting land for crop production. One difference was the harvesting and marketing of corn cobs for mushroom compost. Still involved with this unique commodity, it provides off farm income while working toward profitability in his new farming/vineyard and wine/distillery business.

With his business partner, Garrett Schorran, Stony Run has Vineyards in Albany, Greenwich and Upper Macungie townships. It is a diversified agricultural operation consisting of 22 varieties of grapes, heirloom open pollinated corn varieties, rye and hay. Larry stated, "I wanted to find a way to establish a profitable farm operation without competing for rented farmland. I wanted to develop a high value/ intensive cropping model that would be profitable and also create income to purchase the farm." The solution was planting Vineyards and growing specialty grains for our field to glass Winery and Distillery. He mentioned; "Our preserved farm is almost half Vineyards and half crop land. The steeper, highly erodible, shale soils are ideally suited for grape production and are not disturbed for decades while the grass row middles, dramatically reduce soil erosion and run off. The cropland is no-till and minimum till contour farmed using crop rotation. Our weather, soils and plant material are nearly identical to those in Bordeaux, France, making our wines competitive in quality with French counterparts. Our dry red, white or sparkling wines have taken best in state honors almost every year. We have also located and are propagating several open pollinated "whiskey" corn varieties from the 1800's and making heritage bourbons and rye whiskey from these grains after this year's harvest. Hopefully we can prove the profitability of grapes and other specialty crops, so more young farmers will be able to buy farms and support their families without the need for off farm income. I believe in farmland preservation, as it will ensure that future generations will have the open farmland needed to allow agriculture to evolve as future opportunities present themselves". Their wines and spirits are marketed through Stony Run Winery's tasting rooms in Breinigsville, as well as in area stores and restaurants.