

NEBRASKA'S FIRST "OLD WORLD" VINEGARY



George and Karen Johnson and their children, Eric, Adam and Emily never dreamed that a few scrawny grapevines would result in Nebraska's first "Old World" vinegary? In 1999, the Johnson's started growing wine-making grapes on their ranch. After experimenting with winemaking and at the suggestion of a friend, Noah, they pursued the idea of making balsamic-style vinegar.

With grant funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Johnson's conducted a feasibility study and discovered an incredible potential for traditional style gourmet vinegar. One promising product area was apple cider vinegar which led them to Kimmel Orchard and Vineyard in Nebraska City and University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Food Processing Center. Moving forward with the project, Johnson sought out Dr. Durward Smith, UNL Extension food process specialist familiar with the chemistry and research involved in processing the state's wild and cultivated fruits. Dr. Smith taught him how to freeze fruit juices to make vinegar concentrate. "That single thing provided us with the process in making our very best vinegars," Johnson said.

A Nebraska Agricultural Innovation and VAA grant, combined with much of the Johnsons' life savings, allowed them to construct a place for their business, George Paul Vinegar.

Wanting the vinegary to be as sustainable and energy-efficient as possible they chose a straw-bale building.. The building's passive solar design and thick bale walls keep it cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

The Johnsons describe their vinegar-making process as "one of only a handful of companies in the U.S. that make vinegar in an "Old World" style. George Paul Vinegar offers red, white, raspberry and apple vinegars made from Nebraska - grown fruits, including apples grown at Kimmel Orchards, wild plums, chokecherries, sand cherries and raspberries. The classic red and white wine vinegars are made from cold-hardy grape varieties grown in the Sandhills.



Currently George Paul Vinegar has one full-time and two part-time employees, but expects to grow to three full-time employees and multiple part-time harvest employees.



For more information, or to order one of these "Old World" products, contact George Johnson at 402-823-4067, or georgepaulvinegar@gmail.com. George Paul Vinegar at 302 E. Nebraska Ave., in Cody, Neb.