

such as Peru, Bolivia and Chile where alpaca fiber production is one of the largest industries.

The Dunkelbergs seem content with the changes they've made in their farming operation and the positive impact it has had on their lives. "This is really a family-run business," Dunkelberg explains, noting that her sons, Kevin, 20 and Kyle, 16 play an instrumental role on the farm.

Thousand Islands Winery

An important part of keeping the North Country's agricultural economy thriving is fostering the development of new agricultural businesses, and people like Steve Conaway choose to pursue an agricultural venture as their foray into entrepreneurship.

Although Conaway never operated an agricultural business prior to opening Thousand Island Winery (www.thousandislandswinery.com), farming was in his blood. Raised on a dairy farm in Pennsylvania, Conaway left behind his agricultural roots to pursue a career in the military. During that career he had the opportunity to spend five years in Germany where he began to develop an interest in viniculture. "I began going to wineries and learning about wine," he says.

When Conaway was nearing the end of his military service he was stationed at Fort



Above: Thousand Islands Winery is housed in a renovated 1836 barn in Alexandria Bay.

Left: Steve Conaway uses a wine thief to sample wine produced at Thousand Islands Winery.



Drum as a contracting officer, and began putting plans in motion for the winery. In 2001 he and his wife, Erika, purchased a farm in Alexandria Bay. "I found that property appealing because of its location," he explains. "Boldt Castle reminded me of Germany, along the Rhine River where there are a lot of castles and a lot of wineries."

By May, 2003 Conaway had teamed up with Frank and Michelle Mayer and the winery began production. Thousand Islands Winery opened to the public in July, 2003 and has continued to offer a full slate of attractions for wine lovers living in and vis-

iting the area. Winery visitors can enjoy tours of the wine-making facility and vineyard. There is also plenty of opportunity for wine tasting and a great selection of wine, local food items and supplies for home wine production. "We are truly an agri-tourism business," Conaway explains, noting that guests at the winery can see all of the steps in the production process.

In addition to the tourism market, Thousand Islands Winery also enjoys a healthy retail market through mail order and has an established wholesale market distributing to northern New York liquor stores.

Thousand Islands Winery also enjoys the advantage of being licensed as a New York Farm Winery, which means their wine is entirely produced from New York State-grown grapes. This gives the winery the ability to sell their wines at summer farmers' markets around the North Country in addition to year-round markets in Syracuse and Rochester.

Thousand Islands Winery has grown at a pace much faster than Conaway expected. "Our business increased 500% in the first year," he recalls.

This growth is reflected in the creation of jobs that has also occurred at the winery. During the summer months, the winery's

peak season, anywhere from 16 to 20 employees are on the payroll.

But with growth there also comes challenges. "My biggest challenge to meet the demand is a shortage of grapes," Conaway explains. His on-site vineyard is just two acres, but Conaway points out that 13 acres of vineyard are required to support the winery's current production level. So the majority of his grape supply is purchased from other vineyards in New York.

Conaway is an active advocate for the further development of the wine-making industry in the region. He has been instrumental in the creation of the Seaway Wine and Viniculture Association, which brings together wine producers and grape growers from all over northern New York. Members of the association operate a network that works for the benefit of this blossoming North Country industry and sometimes works as a cooperative, allowing members to share costs on items such as equipment.

"People really work together to create this industry," Conaway says. "We need wineries, nurseries producing vines and vineyards producing grapes. All of these things are needed to create a new wine region in northern New York."

Plans are already in the works to create a wine trail in the Thousand Islands region with the guidance of the Jefferson County Agricultural Development Corporation, demonstrating that boutique agriculture can truly become a viable part of the area's economy.

The Many Flowers Honey Company

Even when an agricultural venture is a hobby operation, the potential still exists for positive economic impact. Ted Elk does not rely on The Many Flowers Honey Company as his primary source of income, but the operation plays a significant role in the agricultural economy of northern New York.

Elk has been operating The Many Flowers Honey Company in Alexandria Bay

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7 Maple Street
Potsdam, NY 13676
315.265.4046
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