

# THE VIEW FROM RED TAIL RIDGE

BY DAVE POHL

While it is a relative newcomer to the Finger Lakes region, Red Tail Ridge Winery has raised the bar for sustainability. Its owners, Nancy Irelan and Mike Schnelle, say they view sustainability as a “systems approach that seeks to balance the environment, community, and finance.” To them, financial stability is essential, as it frees up time, energy, and other resources to focus on issues related to community and the environment.

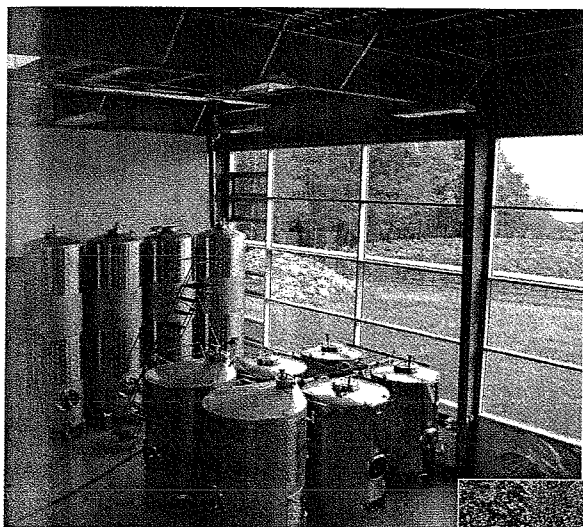
One of the most exciting aspects of the operation is the building itself. In 2009, Red Tail Ridge became the only winery in New York State to register for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for its new building. In the hope of qualifying, the owners consulted with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and Sustainable Performance Consulting Inc. for guidance on building an energy efficient and environmentally sound winery. Edge Architects of Rochester created the building design.

Temperature inside the winery is controlled by a geothermal heating and cooling system. Liquid glycol passes through coils of pipes underground; then, having absorbed the earth’s heat, it is pumped back into the building and circulated through pipes in the floors and walls. This system controls the temperature not only of the air but of the stainless-steel fermenting tanks. While other alternative energy sources were considered, geothermal was selected because it required a smaller initial investment and will pay for itself more quickly—and it can be controlled remotely, via laptop computer.

Environmental considerations were also crucial when choosing building products. The winery walls contain recycled materials, and the fieldstone on the facade came from the vineyard grounds. The front of the building is dominated by a large double-paned window that allows daylight to flood in, so it’s usually possible to work inside without turning on any lights.

Sustainability at Red Tail Ridge extends to the viticultural practices as well. The vineyard has drainage ditches to manage

*Green land: Red Tail Ridge Winery features (clockwise from bottom) a vineyard that emphasizes sustainable growing practices, a geothermal heating and cooling system, and windows that offer ample natural light.*



PROVIDED BY RED TAIL RIDGE WINERY





*No one does "I do" like we do.*

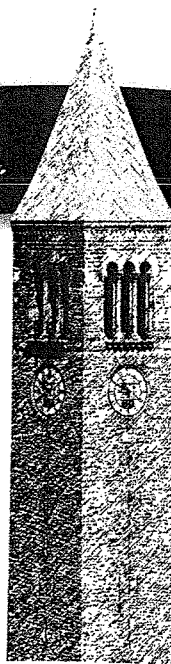
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rainwater runoff, and tile installed at forty-foot intervals supports soil preservation and maintains vineyard uniformity. Watering is done with drip irrigation, which is more efficient and uses less water than conventional sprinkler systems.

While Red Tail Ridge does not qualify as organic, the winery uses an integrated pest management approach to control insects, disease, and weeds. Leaf pulling optimizes fruit exposure, which reduces disease pressure, and regular scouting for insects and their damage determines if treatment is necessary. When pesticides are used, the winery chooses ones that meet EPA reduced-risk standards; chemicals are rotated to prevent resistance. Non-interventionist approaches are used for dealing with animal pests: eight-foot-high fencing keeps out deer, and netting prevents birds from damaging vines and grapes.

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Irelan and Schnelle also consider sustainability in the tasting room. Waste is kept to a minimum, paper products are made from recycled materials, and no bottled water is served. In the restrooms, low-flow toilets have been installed.

With its high-profile sustainability efforts, Red Tail Ridge offers an impressive example to other wineries—and Irelan says that New York State was the ideal place for their approach. She and her husband had considered Oregon and California before coming to the Finger Lakes, but they concluded that creating a sustainable winery from the ground up would be prohibitively expensive in those western states. "We knew when we started that [green] was the direction we wanted to go in," Irelan says. "The challenge was doing this as a small business and seeing a return on our investment. This is the best place we could find to do that."