



HYG-1433-09

# Direct Marketing of Small Fruit Crops to Ohio Wineries

**Maurus Brown**

Small Fruit Crops Specialist  
OSU South Centers, Piketon

**Julie Fox**

Direct Marketing Specialist  
OSU South Centers, Piketon

## Introduction

Ohio wineries primarily focus on making wine from grapes, but there are some who have an interest in purchasing other small fruit crops for wine production. As new wineries come into production, the overall demand for quality fruit is increasing. Demand for fresh fruit depends on the total number of wineries that will be producing some type of fruit wine. An increasing number of Ohio wineries purchase locally grown fruit.

## Small Fruit Marketing Plan

### **Section 1: Marketing Summary**

The Marketing Summary is the first page of your marketing plan, but it should be the last section you write. Summarize the key points that you have written in your small fruit marketing plan in this concise summary.

### **Section 2: Small Fruit Business Situation**

Know the current demand and supply of small fruit, potential industry growth, and where your business fits in the overall wine industry.

### **Section 3: Potential Buyers**

List your potential and existing customers, document their location, interest in your products, and anything else that demonstrates why they are interested in purchasing the fruit you produce.

### **Section 4: Products and Services**

What fruit will you have for sale, in what quantities, and when will it be available? What is your overall production, how is the fruit processed, and what size are the containers that the fruit will be shipped in? Your pricing assumptions should include what, when, and how customers will pay.

### **Section 5: Places**

How and where do you distribute your fruit?

### **Section 6: Promotions**

What benefit do you provide the winery and how will you communicate with them? What types of marketing strategies do you invest in and when? What organizations and directories do you participate in? What makes your fruit produce unique—why will wineries want to buy from you?

Who are your competitors and how can you position your fruit sales to be competitive?

### **Section 7: Process**

**Money**—How much money is invested and when? How much income is projected and when?

**Management**—How will you manage field production—planting, pest control, and harvest? How do you manage production risks?

### **Section 8: Measures of Success**

What are your overall business goals and how does this marketing plan help? What will be your measure of success—number of customers, sales?

Marketing is not only much broader than selling, it is a whole business seen from the customer's point of view (Peter Drucker).

OSU Direct Marketing:  
<http://directmarketing.osu.edu/>

### **Winery and Grower Partnership**

Direct marketing is often referred to as interactive marketing because it goes beyond mass marketing's broad audience appeal and involves two-way communication between sellers and buyers (Spiller and Baier, 2005). Growers are strongly encouraged to meet with Ohio winemakers to discuss the potential for contracting sales of fresh, locally grown fruit. It is important to establish a good working relationship with the winemaker and learn what parameters are required in terms of pounds/tons needed, quality of fruit, and degree of sugar content.

Coordinating fruit harvest with a winemaker is very important and involves specific needs for delivery of the fresh picked fruit, including date, time of day, and size of shipping container. Maintaining good fruit quality during harvest and shipping will help assure quality fruit for winemaking.

### **Current Status and Potential Growth of the Ohio Small Fruit Industry**

A description of the current status of the small fruit industry should be included in a marketing plan. This will enable the winery an opportunity

to study the necessity of contracting with a fruit grower to assure adequate volume of fresh fruit. Information should include:

- Number of small fruit growers in Ohio
- Number of fields committed to specific crops (e.g., blueberries, raspberries)
- Acres of small fruit crops grown locally and statewide
- Projection of future production of small fruit crops
- Analysis of market conditions and prices received for small fruit crops

Information on Ohio fruit production can be obtained at the following USDA web site: <http://www.nass.usda.gov/>.

### **Small Fruit Crops Market Influences and Risk Assessment**

There are several potential reasons why a fruit operation may be successful or why it may fail. Certain factors play an important role in its success or failure and are not easily controlled by the grower. The productivity and longevity of the fruit crops being grown will help determine the potential profit. Some key factors of fruit production include:

- Overall demand from Ohio wineries
- Demand for locally grown fruit
- Cost of producing fruit
- Machinery cost for producing fruit
- Labor availability and cost

Natural events can have a major impact on fruit production. Some common reasons why fruit crops may not be productive include:

- Abnormal weather (excessive spring/fall frosts and extreme low winter temperatures)
- Pollution may negatively impact fruit
- Deer feeding on tender vegetation
- Birds eating mature fruit
- Pests can reduce yields and quality
- Soil compaction can reduce yields

## Small Fruit Crops Marketing Analysis

A market analysis is an important component of a market plan and can be used to show lenders and investors the need for your product. Local, state, and national market trends can all play an important part in whether or not your fruit sells and the price you receive. In order to properly market your fruit, you will need to estimate the number of tons you will be selling.

In order to measure the potential profit in small fruit production, the overall sale of fruit and price received per pound/ton will impact the total income.

The importance of growing and marketing high quality fruit cannot be overemphasized. Wine produced from pest-ridden fruit will generally have an inferior quality and is not palatable. This can ultimately reduce the value of your fruit. Quality of the fruit can also be measured in terms of the sugar content, which is evaluated as a percent of soluble solids (Brix°).

## Current Winery Situation

There are more than 120 commercial wineries in Ohio and the demand for locally grown fruit has grown by more than 100% in the last ten years. Ohio wineries are in need of fruit that is locally grown, which will help to reduce the cost of having fruit shipped in from out of state.

## Fruit Quality and Volume

A brief description of the field production would be helpful for buyers looking to purchase fresh, pest-free fruit. To maximize quality, fruit

should be allowed to ripen to its fullest potential. Total acreage of your fruit production should be provided to show wineries what volume of fruit they could expect.

A list of fruit produced and anticipated harvest dates for each crop will enable a winemaker to better gauge when fruit will be shipped.

Some varieties of blueberries, strawberries, and brambles mature early in the harvest season and other varieties mature late. Actual harvest date will depend on the stage of ripeness, which can be monitored by measuring sugar content (Brix°). Full sunlight is required to produce quality fruit and high yields. Pruning practices can impact sunlight penetration and thus influence the overall fruit quality and flavor.

## Marketing Tools

Growers can use different resources to market their crops (i.e., MarketMaker® [www.ohiomarketmaker.com/](http://www.ohiomarketmaker.com/)) including wineries that want to purchase fruit. The Ohio Grape-Wine Electronic Newsletter (OGEN) is another means for growers to market fruit to wineries ([www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/grapeweb/](http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/grapeweb/)).

## Summary

Success in selling your fruit to a winery will depend on your marketing plan. This is your best opportunity to receive full attention from wineries. A marketing plan will help show how you produce high-quality fruit, and how a specific winery can profit from buying your fruit.

## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

Visit Ohio State University Extension's web site "Ohioline" at: <http://ohioline.osu.edu>

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA.

Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension  
TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868