

# Homesteading cider makers establish Deep Roots in Bradford County

By Jeff Fetzer

A SUGAR RUN man's fancy for the forbidden fruit has fueled a blossoming cider business in Bradford County.

Claverack member Tim Wells established Deep Roots Hard Cider in 2014 to indulge his passion for crafting hard ciders and to make a living off of the chosen fruit of his labors.

Mission accomplished. After just three seasons of operation, Wells works full time tending to his farm-based business located on aptly named Back Road in Wilmot Township. And a major expansion project to quench the public thirst for his ciders will begin this summer.

"This year we are producing 1,800 gallons," Wells reports. "We would have done more if we had the space, but we are pushing the walls at this point."

The county's only commercial cidery has experienced rapid growth since Wells and his wife, Lynda, began peddling their home-crafted cider in the summer of 2015. That first year, they produced 500 gallons of their Deep Roots Original, a cider made from locally sourced Northern Spy apples.

"We did a few festivals the first year and got a really good reception with only one variety," Tim says. "So the next year, we bought a bigger processing building and made blueberry- and raspberry-flavored ciders, as well as the Original. We also added Barrel Reserve, which was our Original hard cider put into a Woodford Reserve bourbon barrel and aged for about six months."

The couple expanded their product line again to seven varieties of hard ciders and upped total production to 1,100 gallons last year. They also opened a tiny tasting room on their 70-acre property. By Christmas, they had run out of product.

## Growing Roots

When the tasting room re-opened this season on April 20, patrons could



**APPLE OF THEIR EYES:** Claverack members Tim and Lynda Wells of Sugar Run share a smile from behind the bar of the tasting room at Deep Roots Hard Cider, located on Back Road in Wilmot Township, about 6 miles outside of Wyalusing. The couple have parlayed Tim's passion for apples and crafting ciders and Lynda's business and marketing skills into a thriving business.

sample three new varieties of hard cider and two dessert fruit wines added to the Deep Roots stable over the winter. Beginning in June, visitors will see construction of the business' new processing and storage facility, a 40-by-60 climate-controlled building that will also house a greatly enlarged tasting area.

"We had one of those serious conversations last year," says Lynda. "We had no more room for processing and storage, but we had sold all of our product. And we have this cute little tasting room, which I love, but we would have a bus full of people stop here. But we have a maximum capacity of eight to 10 at a time inside and only have seating for two or three at the bar."

Lynda, who holds an MBA from the University of Massachusetts and runs

the business side of the operation, says the new tasting room will be three to four times larger than the current room, and the expanded bar will accommodate up to 15 cider samplers at a time.

"It's equal parts exciting and terrifying," says Lynda of the decision to take on debt in order to expand. "Everything seems to be moving the right direction. We know we have a good customer base, and we are a niche market, but it's still big and scary."

The tasting room is open Friday through Sunday from noon to 6 p.m. from mid-April until Christmas. The Wellses hope to open the new tasting room by Labor Day.

Although Tim has been crafting hard ciders and making fruit wines for more than a decade, operating a cidery

was not his original occupational goal when he moved to Bradford County in 2009.

What he had initially intended to do was operate a pick-your-own apple orchard on the property, which had been owned by Lynda's grandparents. So he set about planting a 900-tree apple orchard on the property. With the success of his cidery, the Wellses scuttled the you-pick orchard idea and will instead use apples harvested from the orchard to supplement their cider-making operation.

## Planting the seed

Tim became smitten by all things apple after taking a field trip to a private orchard during his senior year at Cornell University in 2007.

"They talked about grafting trees, cider production, orchard management — that was my light-bulb moment," Tim says. "I liked the whole aspect of getting my hands dirty, being out in the fresh air, and growing apples. There is a bit of mystique to an apple orchard, and it was something that I could see myself



**BOTTLING BRIGADE:** Inside the Deep Roots Hard Cider processing building, Tim and Lynda Wells and their volunteer helpers, Jon Zakrzewski and Anne Graham, chat as they finish up a day of bottling work in early April. The Bradford County cidery utilizes a cold fermentation process for all of its apple wines in order to impart a richer apple flavor. The ciders are aged for five to six months before bottling begins in the spring.

doing for many years."

"Plus, you know," quips his wife, "making booze is fun."

It wasn't long after that fateful field trip that Tim made his first batch of home brew from apples he harvested from a Jonamac tree growing at his parents' property in Ithaca.

After graduating from Cornell in the spring of 2007 with a bachelor's degree in plant science, Tim took a summer job working for Cornell University's orchard, where he participated in the picking, pressing and processing of apples.

"At that point, I really didn't know what I wanted to do, but I knew it had to do with apples," Tim says.

2007 proved

to be a defining time in the life of Tim Wells. He not only graduated from an Ivy League university, discovered his career calling and began dabbling in cider-making, he also met his future bride in a plant genetics class during his final semester at Cornell.

## A nice pairing

Lynda, who hails from Elmira, N.Y., earned a bachelor's degree from Cornell in agricultural science with an emphasis on soil science, which complemented Tim's focus on plant science and entomology.

They married in December 2008 and entered the ag industry by jointly hiring on at a large apple orchard and vegetable farm in Fishkill, N.Y. Tim managed the apple orchard, and Lynda, the vegetable operation.

"We learned a lot of things not to do," Tim says. "It was a great experience — one I will never forget. There is no way I can."

The Wellses say the four-month ordeal didn't sour them on the apple business, but it did prompt Lynda to seek a master's degree in business administration so she could avoid some of the missteps she witnessed while work-

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**A VERY GOOD YEAR:** Deep Roots Hard Cider's 2017 product line includes award-winning Original Hard Cider, Barrel Select, which is aged for six months in Woodford Reserve bourbon barrels, and Raspberry Hard Cider, an apple wine flavored with raspberry juice. Deep Roots has added five new ciders and wines to its 2018 collection, giving customers a dozen beverage options ranging from dry to sweet single- and dual-varietal ciders, fruit-flavored ciders, dessert wines crafted from blueberries and strawberries, and The Wild Ones, crafted from 23 wild apple trees growing on the Wellses' 70-acre farm property.

**Homesteading cider**

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ing for the Fishkill produce grower.

**An apple immersion**

“I was still gung-ho about it,” says Tim. “We came back to Ithaca, and I found a job working for a professor who wanted to establish an orchard at his home.”

Tim prepared the ground, planted 50 apple trees and fenced the orchard.

At the same time, Tim was hired as assistant manager at Triphammer Wine & Spirits, a high-end retail wine dealer in Ithaca.

“That’s where I gathered experience on tasting, the sommelier side of it, how to talk about wines, how to pair them,” he says.

He had a third job at Bellwether Hard Cider, working in the Ithaca-based cidery’s orchard and experiencing the production side of commercial cider-making.

In his spare time, he was delving into the history and science behind cider-making and would have as many as a dozen carboys fermenting ciders and berry wines at home.

“I’ve always loved hard cider,” says Tim. “Hard cider just has that good country feel to it, that taste of fall.”

For the first two years of Deep Roots Hard Cider’s existence, Tim worked swing shift as a general operator at the Dupont plant in Towanda. The cidery’s rapid growth afforded him the opportunity to be a self-sufficient business owner.

“I always knew I wanted to do something for myself,” he says. “I like the freedom of working for myself. And my new boss is great — he lets me drink on the job sometimes!”

Lynda works from home as a medical transcriptionist and homeschools the couple’s two children, Finnegan, 7, and Alice, 5.

The Wellses also put their ag science education and homesteading ethos to work on the farm, growing their own fruits and vegetables and raising pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, and turkeys. The livestock lends to the country

ambiance that appeals to visitors who venture to Deep Roots for a tippie in the tasting room, according to Tim.

But it’s the hard cider that is the real draw to the off-the-beaten path business, located about six miles from Wyalusing off of Route 6.

Deep Roots Hard Cider is considered a wine under Pennsylvania law. It’s sold in wine bottles and contains a higher alcohol content than the beer-style ciders like Woodchuck and Angry Orchard that are sold in six-pack stores and beer distributors.

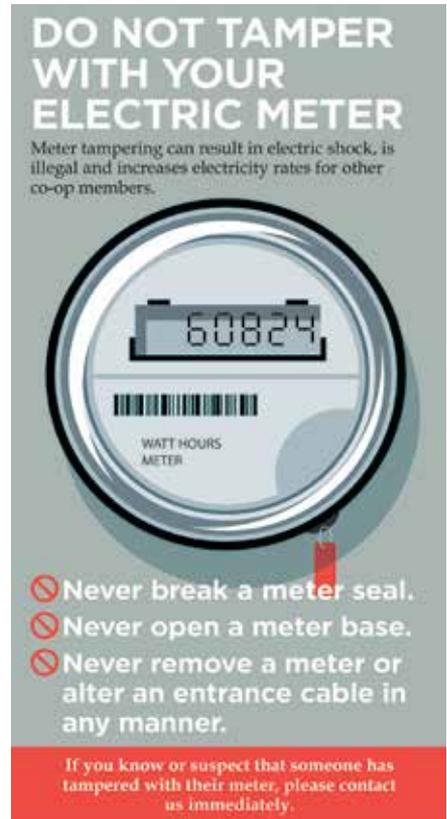
Deep Roots ciders can be purchased at weekly farmers markets in Sayre, Avoca and Tunkhannock from June through October, as well as various wine festivals and craft fairs throughout a six-county region. The ciders are also offered for sale at the Fireplace Restaurant near Tunkhannock and in the Deep Roots tasting room.

With added processing and storage space on the way, the Wellses hope to increase production to 3,000 gallons next year and begin placing their ciders on the shelves of area grocery stores.

A full listing of Deep Roots product offerings, as well as their festival, fair and farm market schedules, can be found online at [deeprootshc.com](http://deeprootshc.com) or by calling 570-746-1668.

“We are very pleased with the response to our offerings so far,” says Tim. “We have a lot of repeat customers, and just about everyone who samples our ciders ends up making a purchase. Our goal is to continue being able to do something we enjoy, be self-sufficient and become a regional producer.” ☀

**OFFICE CLOSING**  
All Claverack offices  
will be closed on  
**Monday, May 28,** in  
observance of  
**Memorial Day.**



**Co-op offers scholarship to MU students**

Applications are being accepted for a \$1,000 scholarship that is available for the 2018-2019 academic year to a Mansfield University student who is a Claverack member or dependent. To be eligible for consideration, students must:

- ▶ be enrolled full time at Mansfield University
  - ▶ demonstrate financial need
  - ▶ be a member or dependent of a member of Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative
  - ▶ demonstrate the highest traits of leadership, citizenship and character.
- Students can apply online by visiting our homepage, [www.claverack.com](http://www.claverack.com), and clicking on Scholarships under the “Your Community” drop-down menu at the top of the screen.

Claverack endowed the scholarship fund at Mansfield University in 2000, with a goal of providing financial assistance to any Claverack member or dependent pursuing a degree at the university.

A member of the State System of Higher Education, Mansfield University attracts many students from throughout the cooperative’s service territory.