

**Local wineries snatch up awards**

*Essex County vintages win over a dozen*

Sharon Hill, Windsor Star

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A \$10-million provincial funding announcement to promote VQA wines is getting praise from large wineries but won't help smaller vintners, said Dennis Sanson of Sanson Estate Winery.

The funding over three years will help wineries that sell through the LCBO such as the local Pelee Island Winery and Colio Estate Wines Ltd. but not wineries that don't sell through the LCBO.

The funding is "well-intentioned but ill-informed," Sanson said after last week's announcement.

"It's not helpful for little wineries but they are still looking for help and we want to participate. We're not looking for a handout. We're looking for a hand-up."

The \$10-million program was good news for Colio Estate Wines, one of the five largest wineries in Ontario.

President Jim Clark, an executive member of the Wine Council of Ontario, said the incentive program will encourage wineries to sell more of their wine, including premium wines, through the LCBO. For consumers that should mean a better variety and more premium wines from Ontario, he said.

The rebate program will help wineries advertise more and compete with wines from around the world, Clark said. "This is very good news for the industry."

Last week Harinder Takhar, Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, announced the \$10 million in funding over three years.

Stephanie Nadalin, a spokeswoman from the minister's office, said wineries that sell VQA wines through the LCBO will be able to receive a credit back for up to 120,000 litres of VQA wine sold. The program will distribute \$3 million the first year and \$3.5 million in the following two years, she said.

"It's to encourage VQA wines which are as you know are 100 per cent Ontario-grown grapes."

Sanson said the ministry should have consulted with smaller wineries. He doesn't have the volume the LCBO requires to sell in stores across Ontario and he can't afford to sell wine through the LCBO where he would get \$4.20 for a \$10 bottle of wine, he said. There are also costs on top of that for promotion, he added.

Sanson said a solution would be to allow wineries to sell their products at local LCBO stores only. Sanson's wine is sold at his winery at 9238 Walker Road.

The majority of Essex County's 12 wineries, including three that haven't opened yet, are smaller wineries.

The announcement was welcomed by the Grape Growers of Ontario. Chairman Ray Duc said it encourages wineries to buy Ontario grapes.

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