



#FridaysOnTheFarm: USDA Loan Helps Couple Toast New Winery

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, the USDA brings people together across the nation for: healthier food, natural resources and people; a stronger agricultural industry; and economic growth, jobs and innovation.

Each Friday, meet those farmers, producers and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday, meet Hillary and Diane Dean, boutique wine operators in Caddo, Oklahoma, who are passionate about wine making. The Deans own and operate Blue River Valley Winery, growing several grape varieties and producing over 15 varieties of wine.

From Hobby to Business

“It all started with homemade peach wine. A family member had us try their homemade wine, and we couldn’t believe the quality. We wanted to try our hand at it,” said Diane. “We started off in the kitchen. Our table space was taken up by small fermenters.”

After making craft beer for nearly 20 years, Hillary and Diane fell in love with making fine wine. Their hobby quickly became a business, selling more than 15,000 bottles of their handcrafted wine in 2016 and over 19,000 in 2017.

“Making wine became a passion. Over the years, we were encouraged to do it commercially,” said Hillary. “It grew so fast, we couldn’t believe it. We thought it would just be a small mom and pop business, but it just exploded.”

Growing a Dream

Before opening their boutique winery, they visited the [Oklahoma Small Business Development Center](#) where they learned about the USDA [Farm Service Agency’s](#) (FSA) loan opportunities. The Deans visited the Bryan County FSA office and met with Greg Mathis, farm loan manager, to explore their options.

“We had a dream and it just didn’t seem like it was going to work out. We came to Greg and everything worked out,” said Hillary. “He was interested in our venture. Greg believed in us and worked very hard to put together our loan.”

FSA’s farm loan programs offer opportunities, such as microloans, to farmers and ranchers by providing access to credit. [Microloans](#) focus on financing the needs of new, niche and small to mid-sized family farm operations.

Producing an Oklahoma Wine

The Deans currently grow muscadine grapes and other grape varieties, but they don't produce enough to supply their entire wine operation. According to Hillary, 100 pounds of grapes will only make about five gallons of wine. To keep up with demand, they purchase juice from several vineyards across the country through a wholesaler.

"Our grapes might be grown all over the United States, but our wine is all Oklahoma," Hillary said. "We ferment the juice and then it goes through the clarification process. When that is done, we fill the bottle and cork it by hand. It's truly a handcraft."

They currently offer 15 varieties of wine at Blue River Valley Winery, including "Blue River Bliss," a blackberry merlot, "Strawberry Blonde," a strawberry white zinfandel, and "Rio Rosa," their blackberry and lemon signature wine. The number of varieties will continue to increase as they keep exploring new flavors.

Agritourism Is an Added Benefit

Since opening, the winery has drawn customers from all over the United States. To increase agritourism, the Deans recently added a covered outdoor pavilion, where guests can enjoy live music on select evenings, hold small weddings and other events.

"There are thousands of varieties of wine that you can make. We get a kick out of making our wine the highest quality that we can," said Hillary. "This doesn't feel like a job. It's something we really enjoy."

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