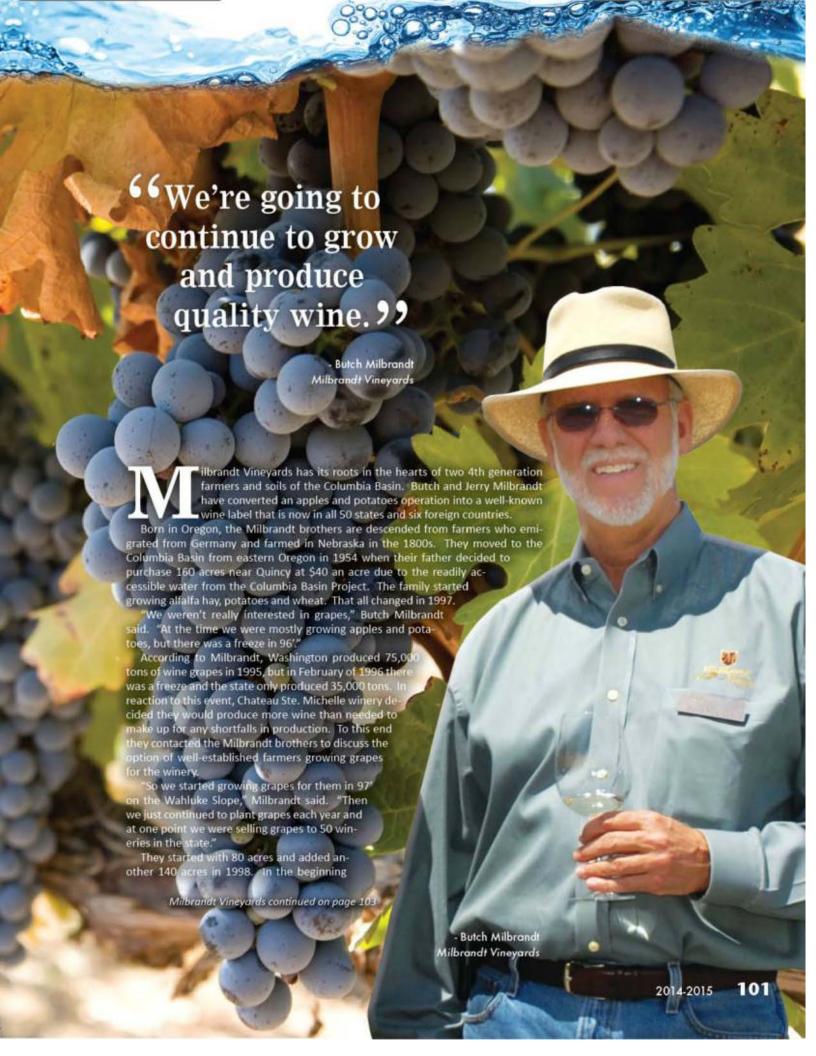
Milbrandt Nineyards Wine brothers.

- Jerry Milbrandt Milbrandt Vineyards

Milhrandt Vineyards Courtesy Photos



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they employed one or two full-time employees - Butch was active in the vineyards at that time - and 10 to 15 part-time employees to help with planting and trellis construction.

There was no doubt in Milbrandt's mind that growing grapes was the right move at the time.

I thought it was going to be successful from the ge go because of the location we had on the Wahluke Slope, which is one of the premium grape growing regions of Washington, and we had a 5-year contract with the largest winery in the state," Milbrandt said. "So, barring any weather phenomena there wasn't any reason not to be successful. You had a little learning curve there going from apples to grapes, but there are plenty of consultants and field men to guide you along.

Since then the Milbrandt's have added 100 to 200 acres of vineyards a year. Today they have 12 distinct estate vineyards for a total of approximately 2500 acres and employ approximately 40 full-time employees and up to an additional 200 employees seasonally across the vineyards.

The vineyards are spread out between the Wahluke Slope area, near Mattawa, Wash., and the Ancient Lakes are in the vicinity of Quincy, Wash. The Wahluke Slope is primarily used for the growing of red grapes, while the Ancient Lakes area, which is approximately a 1000 feet higher in elevation and has a shorter growing season, is used for the growing of white grapes – which Milbrandt said it is well suited for.

The progressive growth of the Milbrandt's operation prompted the opening of their own winery in 2005 and started selling wine under their own label. Opening the winery added another 30 employees to the Milbrandt family operation, 2 million gallons a year in wine production and the need to increase marketing efforts

To help facilitate this, Milbrandt Vineyards opened

their tasting room in Prosser, Wash, in 2008.

"You have to have a face for your brand," Milbrands said. "There has to be some place where people can go and look at you, interact with you, taste the wine, go to dinner - things of that natur

The farm and winery locations were considered too remote and rural for the location, but Prosser offered an idea location due to its already established wineries and tasting rooms in the area - not to mention easy access

Milbrandt said that the most challenging aspect of the vineyard and winery business is marketing. In their case they didn't have to worry about marketing right away, but as they expanded their grape growing operation they had to find homes for that fruit. But it takes time to develop the reputation necessary to sell the grapes - the vineyard needs to have a proven track record.

You have to have a good site," Milbrandt said. "[You] have to be pretty well located as to a good grape growing area, that area has to have some history of producing quality fruit, and then you have to create relationships

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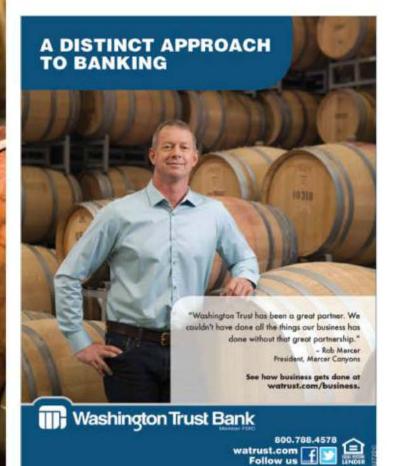


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with those wineries which takes some time because you have to get your grapes into production, you have to market them, and they have to see the results."

Milbrandt Vineyards continues to look for growth opportunities though. They are currently seeking out a possible site for a second tasting room in the Seattle area. A winery can have only two tasting rooms according to Washington State law.

"We've pretty much gone through the quick growth cycle and now it's time to work a little harder at it – get a little more innovative in marketing and sales to that wine out there in peoples' hands," Milbrandt said. "It's going to take more media contact and more time on the street." But that doesn't deter Milbrandt Vineyards. According to Milbrandt, the United States is one of the largest consumers of wine and that number continues to grow. Not only that but wine production in Washington State continues to grow. Grape production in the state is increasing by five to ten percent a year. Milbrandt does caution those who might be interested in getting involved in the grape and wine business though that it is vitally important to have buyer for your product before you get started.

"We're going to continue to grow and produce quality wine," Milbrandt said. "That's the thing about Washington; it does produce very good wine for the price. It's pretty hard to beat."