



 CANADIAN  
 AGRICULTURAL  
 PARTNERSHIP  
Innovate. Grow. Prosper.

# Carmody Cove Vineyard

*Helping keep farms  
in the green*



Canada 

## Program helps Carmody Cove Vineyard pursue dream of creating PEI's first sparkling wine house



Marilyn Kelly, left, and Monica Kelly with a sample of their harvest at Carmody Cove Vineyard in Marshfield. With support from the Perennial Crop Development Program under the federally and provincially funded Canadian Agricultural Partnership, the sisters are developing a 10-acre vineyard and hope to open PEI's first sparkling wine house in 2024.

When hurricane-force Fiona destroyed three-quarters of the grapes at Carmody Cove Vineyard in Marshfield, owners Marilyn and Monica Kelly knew they had to protect the remaining crop from two nights of frost that immediately followed the storm.

Luckily, they had a solution. More wind.

Make that a two-metre-wide portable wind machine which pulled down warmer air from the atmosphere to raise the temperature by a few degrees around the vulnerable grapes and save them from frost damage.

"Our losses would definitely have been higher without the wind machine," says Monica. "Of course, it would have saved even more grapes if Fiona hadn't come through."

For the Kelly sisters, the storm, following on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, was just another unexpected chapter in their seven-year effort to establish a vineyard and create PEI's first sparkling wine house.

It was also a reminder that they have been able to keep pursuing their dream with support from PEI's Perennial Crop Development Program under the federally and provincially funded Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

Over the last two years, the program has helped them develop their 10-acre vineyard with the purchase of an additional 4,000 seedlings, 27,000 metres of bird netting, trellis wires and poles and the wind machine, which they are testing to see how well it controls spring and fall frost damage.

Before the netting was installed, birds would ignore the booms of a bird banger and feast on the grapes. Before the wind machine was brought in, the crop was at the mercy of late and early frost. And the cost of wires, clips and poles for thousands of plants was quickly adding up.

"We are not wealthy, and I don't think we could do this without the support of the program," says Monica, who, like her sister, has been working full-time off the farm to pay the bills while they prepare for full commercial production over the next few years.



Marilyn and Monica Kelly are testing this wind machine as a way of protecting their grapes in the spring and the fall.

“There is still a lot of financial risk involved but the program has helped lessen it and that’s awesome. It is giving us room to be innovative and pursue a vision of agriculture that is maybe a little different on PEI.”

Part of that vision is still an empty spot at the top of their vineyard where they plan to build their sparkling wine house in 2024. The view looking down over sloping fields to the Hillsborough River is spectacular, and it’s easy to imagine tourists and Islanders relaxing and enjoying the scenery with a glass of sparkling wine.

That’s what the sisters are banking on. They want to sell sparkling and still wines made from their own grapes and join a movement of Island food entrepreneurs who are making PEI a destination for unique food and drink.

“We both have a background in hospitality and restaurants, and we want to create a memorable experience for tourists and locals,” says Marilyn. “We want to bring people to our really beautiful little corner of PEI with wines that are unique to us.”

Adds Monica, “We want to embed ourselves in the tourism industry and showcase how wine can be this great complement to the food of the Island.”

While they talk enthusiastically and knowledgeably about grapes, both admit they are still learning.

“I have a master’s degree in social anthropology and Marilyn has a master’s degree in political science, so this has been a little out of our comfort zone,” Monica says with a laugh. “But our vineyard is on our grandparents’ farmland and I guess that desire to work on the land is in us.”

Monica was puttering around with her recently retired father on a trial acre of wine grapes in 2013 when the idea of producing sparkling wine began to bubble.

“I was working at a steak and seafood restaurant at the time and people would come in and ask about local wine and we didn’t have any PEI wines on the list,” Monica recalls. “I remember thinking that Island sparkling wines could be a real addition to wine- and food-based tourism.”

In 2015, Monica and Marilyn set things in motion when they went to British Columbia for a three-month-long wine-making program. When they came back, they expanded the one-acre wine grape experiment into a three-acre vineyard.

Two years later, they returned to BC for months of advanced wine-making training and to spend time with local winemakers. Then, they expanded the vineyard to 10 acres.



Glen Kelly helps with the harvest at Carmody Cove Vineyard.



“We were able to spend some time working with smaller vineyards and farm wineries, get to see their practices and really learn from wine makers and grape growers,” says Monica.

“I think that knowledge has helped us shape where we want to go,” adds Monica. “It’s the idea that we can grow grapes and produce sparkling wine that really pair well with our agricultural and seafood harvests in PEI, and that can go really well with our celebrations on the Island.”

While Carmody Cove Vineyard is finetuning its grape production – its 15 varieties include some smaller trials, including the finicky Pinot Noir – Monica and Marilyn have been developing partnerships to sell their grapes.

For the last two years, Lone Oak Brewing Company in Borden-Carleton has been buying some of their grapes for a beer-wine fusion.

Last year, Halifax-based 2 Crows Brewing Company used their L’Acadie grapes in an India Pale Ale blend and just recently released a barrel-aged sour using

Carmody’s Marquette grapes.

Carmody Cove Vineyard has also been selling grapes to three wineries in Nova Scotia.

As for their own wines, the sisters say they are still in the testing phase, producing samples

for their friends and supporters, including their father who has been a “jack of all trades” in the vineyard, and their mother who is doing their books.

“We want to offer something that Islanders can be proud of and enjoy, that’s really our goal,” says Monica. “We’ll take the time to make sure we get it right.”

Both Monica and Marilyn credit the Perennial Crop Development Program as more than just a source of financial support.

“When you are putting a lot on the line, it can be easy to start doubting yourself,” says Monica. “For young entrepreneurs, it means a lot to have someone believe in your project.”



Marilyn Kelly harvests the grapes at Carmody Cove Vineyard.