



Vine takes roots on plantations near Pinsk

Brest Region grows and processes vines on industrial scale while achieving obvious success

By Yuri Chernyakevich

The melody of 'I'll bury grape seed in the warm earth' sounds each time Vladimir Selivanov's phone rings. The famous song by Soviet bard Bulat Okudzhava is certainly appropriate for the Deputy Director of Pinsk Wine Producing Factory, who cherishes the 'southern vine' in the capital of Belarusian Polesie, as do its other residents. The Pinsk District is now producing wine using grapes grown on its own plantations.

However, this has nothing to do with climate warming. Probably, some won't believe but grapes have been grown in Polesie for a long time and investigations began about five decades ago. After receiving an additional land lot, Pinsk resident and a plant breeder Ivan Shevchuk has studied more than 150 types for the vineyard before laying here a unique plantation of these southern plants.

However, this is now only history, while the reality is that, at present, rather big volumes of amber bunches are currently cropped in the Pinsk District's Sadovy. Almost ten years have passed since the first commercial vineyard was laid down in Belarus. Frankly speaking, at that time many were sceptical about the success of the venture. I've met major 'adventurer' of this endeavour in the Pinsk District — agronomist Cheslav Limanovsky.

Mr. Limanovsky tells us, "It all began when I came into the office of the director of Pinsk Wine Producing Factory and proposed that we grow our own grapes. The project was quite risky, but director Sergey Tabunov was bold in responding to my offer. Gradually, our 'adventure' began to be implemented."

Meanwhile, Cheslav had previously worked in Moldova, where vineyards are commonplace, and was keen to discover the secrets of vine cultivation. His

hobby became a serious ambition in the course of time, and couldn't do without definite knowledge. Therefore, Mr. Limanovsky purchased and ordered lots of special literature and communicated with scientists-agronomists in Belarus while also visiting

occupies 40 hectares, with half providing a considerable harvest (last year, 100 tonnes). This summer, local agronomists hope to harvest 1.5 times more.

Enterprise Director Victor Kononchuk believes that much more can be achieved, having joined

ambitious name Belarusian Winegrowing and Grape Wine of Belarusian Origin.

"No one believed then in the success of this activity. Even I was more an enemy than a supporter," admits Mr. Kononchuk. "Now, I understand that I was simply wary of that

Sadovy, about 15km from Pinsk, you simply need consent from the factory management to pay a visit. My first impression was of the expanse of straight rows, stretching hundreds of metres from north to south: best for catching the sun. Each vine needs the

course, the purchase and installation of bottling equipment. Remarkably, the Italian equipment was bought with financial support from the Belarusian Innovation Fund. At present, Pinsk Wine Producing Factory is the first and only enterprise in the country to produce wine from its own grapes: appropriately called Alpha — actually the first in the long history of Belarusian wine growing.

"In offering this product to the market, we set a precedent," notes Mr. Kononchuk. "We're ready for criticism from our competitors and will strive to keep improving our product as we go along; everyone needs to acknowledge their weaknesses. We want to continue developing, so will certainly expand our vineyard planting area. In addition, in the near future, we intend to implement another ambitious project — to begin production of grape juice, Calvados and cognac. We won't forget about tourism either, organising wine tours for Belarusian and foreign travellers."

Mr. Kononchuk is convinced that his brand will find its niche within the next decade but notes that financial support is necessary. Foreign investors may come forward as the factory gains fame abroad. Already, its concentrated apple juice is being exported to the USA, Germany and Austria. Naturally, Belarusian wine production is in its infancy but Pinsk has made its mark and can be considered to be the capital of Belarusian wine growing. This district centre of the Brest Region even hosts the Republican exhibition-fair of winegrowers each autumn: following harvest time. Visitors can sample various grape varieties and buy or order seedlings suited to our climate, while receiving necessary consultations from sellers and farmers. Whether Pinsk's success can be replicated elsewhere is yet to be seen but it is possible. Belarusian grapes may one day seem commonplace



Produce by Pinsk winegrowers enjoying demand at trade fairs

Cheslav Limanovsky is the founder of Pinsk vineyard

People have worked with vine in the Pinsk District for several years

Moldova for consultations. Finally, with hard work, patience and persistence, he managed to achieve that considered almost impossible before...

Back in March 2003, just four acres of land was allocated for the vineyard, near Pinsk, where the first seedlings were planted in early June. Now, the site

the state programme for Potato, Vegetable and Fruit Farming Development. The vineyard is to be extended to 150 hectares by 2015, yielding about 120,000 decalitres of wine: the level of the average Moldovan plant. He began as a maintenance foreman, so remembers well how the project was born under the

which was new. However, thanks to Mr. Limanovsky, I changed my point of view and now fully support the idea. It's our brand or innovation nowadays, unlike any other in Belarus."

As the saying goes, it's better to see once than hear a hundred times so I decided to tour the vineyard. Near the small town of

warmth to mature its fruit. It reminded me of the vineyards in the Crimea; it was a real revelation to find similar 'southern views' in Belarus.

The path to success has been thorny at times. It was no easy task to convince people that vines really can grow in Polesie on an industrial scale. When they finally managed to persuade all those who doubted they enthusiastically undertook the new endeavour which yielded fruit only a decade after. Last July, the first wine from their own harvest was bottled at the factory, following ten hard years of vineyard planting, gaining a license for production of wine and, of