

**Getting to the core of the apple cider craze**

Vineland Research studying consumer preferences for the adult beverage

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By Luke Edwards, Grimsby Lincoln News



*As hard ciders become more popular, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre's Consumer Insights department has been studying what consumers are looking for in a cider. The research will help producers cater to preferences to create award winning ciders like this one from Ironwood, and also provide information for apple growers on which varieties they should produce. - Steve Henschel/Metroland*

LINCOLN — There's no question more people are discovering their love of cider as a spirit of choice, it's one of the largest growing sales sector at the LCBO. The question is why?

Or more specifically, what makes a commercially viable and delicious cider?

That's the question Vineland Research and Innovation Centre research director Amy Bowen and her team in the consumer insights department tried to answer last year when 50 ciders were profiled and 15 put through the centre's sensory panel.

“There’s a lot of buzz about cider right now, and its exponential growth,” said Bowen.

Researchers first developed a lexicon of 22 sensory attributes used to describe the taste, aroma, flavour, mouthfeel and colour of the different ciders. It could be everything from sweetness and bitterness to tropical fruit or bruised apple flavour.

The ciders were split into five groups. The sensory panel — a group of trained tasters — then rated 15 different ciders based on the lexicon developed.

As research continues, Bowan expects to see two groups of cider drinkers be distinguished, those who prefer a very sweet cider and those who like a drier, more complex drink. That’s not unlike the development of wine drinkers, where the sweeter white wines are often where consumers begin, before moving to the more complex whites and ultimately reds.

“I think it will probably be a similar pattern with cider,” she said.

Interestingly, two of the three top-rated ciders in the study were not among the five best selling brands at the LCBO. Bowan said a lot of that has to do with marketing, brand recognition and a lack of knowledge of what people truly like in a cider.

The basis for this research is not only to get an idea of what consumers want, but also provide information for apple growers who may be considering devoting some of their orchards to cider apples. With expectations that seven million litres of local craft cider will be pouring into the market by 2020, there’s going to be increasing demand on apple growers.

But increasing the yield of different varieties of apple is not a quick pivot. It takes a few years after planting for trees to begin producing fruit. That means farmers would potentially be yanking out perfectly fine trees in favour of varieties meant for cider, but then having to wait to see any return on investment.

As a result, growers are understandably hesitant to switch varieties. Research like that done by Bowan and her team will at least provide some assurances to farmers that the switch will be worthwhile.

“We’re looking at what are the right apple varieties,” she said.

There are heritage varieties that could have renewed interest and use as that cider market continues to expand.

<https://www.niagarathisweek.com/community-story/8082204-getting-to-the-core-of-the-apple-cider-craze/>