

CiderCon Rolls Through Adams County

BY JIM HALE Times Staff Writer, January 31, 2018

Some 50 hard cider makers from as far away as England and Kazakhstan toured Adams County Tuesday and sampled beverages from local cideries.

"I'm impressed by how fast the cider industry in this area seems to have developed. It seems to be working really well here," said U.S. Association of Cider Makers board member Dan Wilson. The bus tour was part of the association's annual CiderCon gathering, which this year is taking place in Baltimore.

Adams County is well known among East Coast cider makers, said Wilson, who owns Slyboro Cider House in Granville, N.Y. Many New York apple growers obtain trees from Adams County Nursery, he said.

There has been "explosive growth" in interest in hard cider nationally, Wilson said. The next step, he said, is to build a "sustainable" market through "a lot of education, so people know how to enjoy cider and it becomes a natural choice."

The association is also trying to show apple growers that cider is an increasingly "viable segment" of their market, and to encourage growers to plant a wider range of trees so cider makers have a wider palette of flavors with which to work.

"This area draws national attention to the cider industry," Wilson said.

One of the bus tour's tasting stops was Hauser Estate Winery on Cashtown Road, which makes 14 different varieties of Jack's Hard Cider onsite, using fruit grown at the winery or purchased locally.

Production totals hundreds of thousands of gallons of cider annually, which is distributed in several states, Jonathan Patrono, president of Hauser Estate Winery, said.

Hauser's tasting room opened in 2008. Hauser's began making cider then, but no one expected the skyrocketing upsurge in demand since then, Patrono said.

"We're surprised and happy for the industry" across Adams County, he said, because "everybody has grown, and the apple growers have benefited."

The tour gave participants "a good flavor of Adams County and Pennsylvania cider," Patrono said. The hard cider business has "exploded" in the county in the past three years or so, said Mary Bigham, president and co-founder of the online publication Cider Culture. Like Patrono, she is a local native.

The county's half-dozen or so cider makers represent an unusual concentration for a single locale, Bigham said.

It makes sense for cider to be on a big upswing here, she said, because Pennsylvania is the nation's fourth-biggest apple-producing state and Adams County provides 70 percent of the state's apples.

With varying business plans, flavors ranging from sour to hoppy, and presentations ranging from cans such as those used for beer to taps in bars to bottles like wine, "each cider maker is trying to find their niche," Bigham said, and together they form an "ecosystem" that benefits all.

"It's cool to see our apples making delicious beverages that are beginning to be recognized nationally," Bigham said.

Information on the cider business across the commonwealth is available at paciderguild.org. The Pennsylvania Cider Fest at Hauser, which benefits the Cider Guild and offers the opportunity to sample many Pennsylvania ciders, is set for June 23 this year.

With CiderCon in Baltimore this year, Bigham said it was only natural for her to volunteer to guide a bus tour of Adams County's cider producers.

At Hauser's, tour participants visited the cider making facilities. From the hilltop tasting room, with its 360-degree view of farmland and hills, they descended a seemingly endless spiral staircase to what Bigham termed "a secret lair of cider," a surprisingly vast space filled with huge gleaming tanks. A door led outside, where loads of bright yellow apples were fed into a press as the first step of the cider making process.

Hauser's head cider maker Joe Cuneo-Tomasi showed off his equipment and answered questions.

Also included in the tour, either by a visit or a representative offering samples, were Three Springs Fruit Farm near Wenksville, which produces Ploughman Farm Cider; Big Hill Ciderworks, Gardners; Reid's Orchard and Winery, Orrtanna; and Good Intent Cider, located in Bellfonte but named after the Adams County road where it began.