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**Virginia's  
2,790 Acre,  
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Golden Goose Crop**

Meandering out into the country in search of good wine has become a passion for Washingtonians. And, it turns out ... it's not just about wine. It's environmental stewardship. It's carbon footprint consciousness. It's supporting local farms first. And, it's preserving Virginia's pristine farmland.

As the grand old Commonwealth farms go up for sale, they often get sucked into the urban sprawl of the city by housing developers. Why? The value of land has outpaced the value of the original crops around the Nation's Capital. When a farm changes hands it's pretty near impossible to sustain a mortgage on those large pieces of ground in agricultural use at today's land value prices.

Enter the golden goose crop ... wine grapes. Vineyards are proving to be one of the few successful crops in Virginia that are able to sustain rural land in agricultural use.

Vineyards can be established in relatively small acreage, making it possible to secure the rural destiny of 20, 50 and 100 acre parcels in some of the most gorgeous rolling country settings you'll ever find.

**Vineyards are one of the few successful crops in Virginia able to sustain rural land in agricultural use.**

Virginia's vineyards are small compared to the big western industrial operations. Most of the commonwealth wineries are mom & pop operations, managed by a couple with a passion for preserving the land and creating an exceptional product.

In Virginia, wine is typically made in very small batches and grapes are meticulously monitored and cared for from bud break through sale in an earth-friendly organic fashion - all by hand.

Over the past few years, Virginia wineries have been getting serious attention from national wine media and collectors. The small batch model has also attracted some of the world's best winemakers who have lent their expertise to create some very nice, handcrafted "boutique" or "artisan" wines.

Are vineyards really the golden goose capable of protecting Virginia's increasingly scarce farm land? Ask a vintner and he might hesitate. There are a lot of extra hurdles and expenses Virginia wine entrepreneurs go through getting their products to people.

Most of Virginia's farm wineries are so small that they are unable to take advantage of economies of scale. They pay higher prices for the bottles, corks, labels and such they need to turn grapes into saleable products.

**Virginia's farm wineries sell their products primarily on the farm or at events**

Virginia wineries also have a hard time establishing a viable distribution network.

Huge industrial wineries in other regions can bottle their products then book a distributor to deliver them all out to the big chain restaurants and grocery stores. When a Virginia winery tries to sell their small quantity to a distribution company, many just laugh. It's just not worth it to them to service such small suppliers.

Virginia's farm wineries do enjoy legislation that enables them to sell their products from a tasting room on the farm. They also have the ability to temporarily move their tasting room to a remote location where they can market their products at wine events or farmers markets. That's why Virginia has so many wine festivals. A makeshift distribution system also allows wineries to sell and deliver products directly to local shops and restaurants they find who don't mind processing an extra order to carry local products.

So ... are vineyards really the golden goose crop capable of protecting Virginia's increasingly scarce farm land? Ask any guest you find at a winery and you'll hear a resounding "yes". There's an incredibly strong support mentality among the fans of Virginia's vineyards. They go wandering through Virginia wine country to support the cause. And, oh, by the way, they're also finding some very nice wine.

Please feel free to publish. Wineries Council Inc., 703-823-1868

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