

Cold Spell of the New Year Particularly Welcomed Ice Wine Grape Harvest at Johnson Estate, Westfield, New York

Westfield, (NY) –Western New York has enjoyed quite a mild winter so far this winter. Lake Erie is warm, without its usual encasement of ice and snow, and plows, accustomed to heavy duty in December, have been silent. But there is one place where the recent cold wave is being welcomed with open arms and with wine presses at the ready. Along the shores of Lake Erie, the makers of premium ice wines were beginning to worry that there would be no harvest of ice wine grapes - as true ice wine grapes must be frozen naturally, and it simply has not been cold enough.

And so yesterday, for a brief, but important period, the weather was perfect for ice wine harvest: nice gray skies with temperatures hovering between 14 and 16 degrees Fahrenheit and a tranquil layer of snow on the ground. At Johnson Estate, a hardy band of about twenty hand-harvested nearly 7 tons of excellent quality Vidal and Chambourcin grapes, air-stacking the perforated crates in the vineyards to take advantage of the seven degree evening forecast which would insure that the grapes were icy marbles prior to pressing. With forecasts of warmer weather to come, this harvest took advantage of a small, but critical, window of harvesting opportunity, for if not harvested when frozen, ice wine grapes thereafter are mushy and not usable.

Generally it takes 48 hours of temperatures in the teens to fully ready the Vidal and Chambourcin grapes still hanging on now leafless vines for this unique winter harvest. The frozen grapes are pressed, leaving behind much of the pure water in the form of ice crystals, and producing a nectar-sweet, complex juice that is fermented into a delicious and expensive dessert wine. Ice wines have a long tradition in Austria and Germany and the technique was brought to North America by the Canadians in the 1980's. Today, Johnson Estate produces two types of ice wines, one from Vidal grapes and a rare, red one from Chambourcin grapes. Both types of wines regularly win awards in various competitions as well as Beverage Testing Institute ratings of 90 points, "Exceptional", for the 2007 Vidal Ice Wine and 88 points, "Highly Recommended", for the 2009 Chambourcin Ice Wine.



Early morning start of a snowy harvest of Chambourcin ice wine grapes at Johnson Estate's vineyards on the slopes overlooking Lake Erie, January 3, 2012.

Johnson Estate Winery, New York's oldest estate winery, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011. It is located two miles of Westfield, NY and its renovated tasting room is open year-round. During January and February, the tasting room is open from 10-5 p.m. during the week and 10-6 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. The winery specializes in award-winning cold climate wines, including ice wines, Riesling, and other vinifera and American grape wines. More information is available at www.johnsonwinery.com or by calling **800-Drink-NY** (800-374-6569).