

## A Look Back on MRBIFF: Black Ankle Vineyards



Located off the beaten path in Frederick County, Black Ankle Vineyards received one of MARBIDCO's first Maryland Resource-Based Industry Financing Fund (MRBIFF) loans in 2008. The loan was used to build a straw bale building for hosting wine tastings and storing products. Now, over 10 years later, the vineyard is a thriving business looking to expand.

In the early 2000s, Sarah O'Herron and Ed Boyce first considered starting a vineyard in Maryland. As management consultants, both had experience doing research, and they turned their expertise to learning about grapes and wine. Together they bought Black Ankle Vineyards in 2002, a 150-acre farm. When working with MidAtlantic Farm Credit, they learned about the

support MARBIDCO could offer for them on their project and applied for an MRBIFF loan.

"MARBIDCO's programs helped support us, and from a purely financial standpoint, they helped us when we were considered a high risk," said O'Herron. "However, they have also just been very supportive, getting our name out there when we were new to the industry."

With the loan secured, O'Herron and Boyce had straw planted on the farm. O'Herron said they wanted to craft as much as possible from what was on the property. The idea of a straw bale building was appealing because most of the materials used to build the facility could be found or grown on the farm, and it would be a great insulator for wine. The building has a wooden structure with straw used as insulation, and the roof sits directly on top. This space became both a storage and wine-tasting area. In 2008, the building was complete, and they opened their winery's doors with 15 parking spaces. Since then, they have expanded their facility to include outdoor seating, two additional buildings, and parking for up to 400 cars.

“We now are looking into expansion. We have grown so much here and keep getting bigger,” said O’Herron. “We’ve hit a point where we want to expand into new properties.”

At Black Ankle Vineyard, they have over 50 acres of vines planted, with 45 acres of fruit-bearing. They grow 12 varieties of grapes, which they mix and match to produce their wines. The number of wines they create each year depends on how many grapes they produce. Generally, they sell six to eight wines at one time at their winery.

“When we started we believed we would make good wine,” said O’Herron. “The personal connection with customers who love the area and space has been surprising and much more than we expected. We have a huge wine club, and people who come here every weekend. Our space is nice, welcoming, and comfortable.”

To learn more about Black Ankle Vineyards, check out their website at [www.blackankle.com](http://www.blackankle.com).