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## Saving 2012 grape crop a big boost for Carolina wine industry

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**What is in this article:**  
 Saving 2012 grape crop a big boost for Carolina wine industry  
 Widely recognized  
 Still helping farmers



AS THE ONLY winery in North Carolina owned by lifelong farmers, RagApple Lassie Vineyard has been recognized widely for its heritage, its 4-H Show Calf logo and reputation for good wines.

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farm.

Like so many Yadkin River Valley farms, RagApple Lassie is slowly being surrounded by houses and businesses, and Frank and Lenna are determined to prevent that from happening. They want to pass along the farm and the winery and the tradition of farming to their grandchildren.

Early on in the urbanization process they learned that education, not isolation, is the key to keeping the public on the side of farmers. This philosophy permeates most every move they make in both their farm and wine making businesses.

The wine business is a business within itself, and in addition to the farming operation. Each year Frank and Lenna bottle and sell about 6,500 cases of wine. They grow 15 different varieties of grapes and make 15 different wines.

Since planting the first vineyards in 2000 and subsequently building the winery in 2002, RagApple Lassie Vineyards, has continued its namesake's championship legacy.

Major awards garnered in its four year history include: Finalist — Best New Winery™ by The Wine Appreciation Guild in San Francisco, Best of Show for its 2003 Chardonnay at the North Carolina State Fair, and First Place two consecutive years in the Pacific Rim International in Los Angeles for Best Label/Logo Series.

Plus, every wine produced by RagApple Lassie owns at least two international awards.

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which got as low as 29 degrees F. simply destroyed any grape variety that was in the tender reproductive stages of growth. Hundreds of acres of Yadkin Valley grape vines recovered from the freeze, but made no grapes last year.

Despite the devastating freeze, grapes at RagApple Lassie vineyard did more than fine. "It was the biggest and best crop of grapes we've ever had," Frank says.

The grape crop for the Yadkin Valley grower was so good in fact he had much more, 50 percent more, grapes than he needed for his winery. Frank sold grapes at a fair market price to many, if not most, of the Yadkin Valley's other 37 small wineries.

Singing to his grapes may make the grapes grow better and the wine taste better, but he contends it had nothing to do with saving his grape crop.

Keep in mind Frank has been farming all his life. The name of his winery, RagApple Lassie, comes from the name of a pet dairy calf-cow that his father gave him when he was seven years old. "Other kids had dogs and cats for pets, I had a dairy cow that followed me around everywhere I went," he says with a hint of distinction in his voice.

From his dairy cow pet to his modern day farming practices, Frank Hobson has always been a purist at heart, growing his crops the best he could by using all the technology and expertise he could glean from many sources.

One of those sources for more than 30 years was Lynn Howard, who was until his retirement two years ago an agronomist for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture.

When Frank got started in the wine growing business, Lynn Howard helped him, and perhaps more importantly supported his venture into this new area of agriculture.

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Hobson says.

Howard was so impressed by the results of QuickSol used on a number of different crops by farmers with whom he worked at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, that he was lured out of retirement to help establish and market the new product in North Carolina.

Howard bristles at the mention of QuickSol being another in a long line of materials often referred to by farmers as 'snake oil'.

If QuickSol didn't work, I wouldn't be wearing the company logo on my hat and shirt, and I for sure wouldn't be selling it to my farmer friends. I'm putting my reputation built up by more than 30 years of working with farmers on the line, and the product has delivered every time," Howard says.

For Frank and Lenna Hobson, saving the grape crop was more than an economic savings and subsequent boon from selling their excess grapes to other wineries in the Yadkin Valley, it was another chapter in the extended life of RagApple Lassie.

Because the dairy cow pet, RagApple Lassie that Frank Junior, as he has been called during most of his life, was so used to winning ribbons at county fairs in and around Boonville, Frank and Lenna thought it would be appropriate to adorn the life-size smiling cow that is now the marketing symbol of the winery with a ribbon of her own.

In advertising shoots, RagApple Lassie is adorned with the treasured arrowhead pendant that Frank designed and gave to Lenna as a Valentines gift several years ago.

It showcases a very rare Clovis point arrowhead found on the Hobson farm. The arrowhead, chiseled from jasper over 12,000 years ago, is held by a 14K-gold bezel surrounded by diamonds.

Maybe it was the sacred Indian artifact that protected RagApple Lassie's grapes from the May freeze last year, or maybe it was Frank's singing, but more likely it was the stronger root system and ability to withstand stress provided by the new soil amendment.

As he gazes across his vineyard, and looks toward Pilot Mountain, made famous years ago by the Andy Griffin Show, Frank Hobson says it doesn't really matter, because he's going to count on all three to help his grapes make it through freezing spring weather for a long time to come.

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