

Castlewood Vineyards: creating a fully in-house winery



Business name and size: Castlewood Vineyards Ltd., turnover £200K

Funding awarded: £40K to purchase the equipment needed to press own grapes and provide a service for neighbouring smaller scale vineyards.

Project outline:

Installing a grape press allowed our winery to be fully in house. The equipment featured gyro pallet, neck freezer and disgorging line for sparkling wines.

The challenge: As a small scale vineyard a few tasks during the winemaking process were outsourced as the business couldn't support the capital investment required to purchase industrial scale equipment. Through IRF support, the relevant equipment could be purchased not only to facilitate our own production but also offer services for neighbouring drinks producers.

The challenge of a running a small business and working with a natural product is the ability to balance the correct labour units throughout the year. Certain periods are busier than others so by offering contract disgorging facilities and grape pressing it keeps labour units more uniform throughout the different seasons. Furthermore when your production is outsourced, not only is it costly but you also lose control of your production and deadlines.

The solution:

The challenge was addressed by purchasing the correct equipment for the size of the existing business plus further expansion and contract services. There had already been some investment in a building, this was planned so that the new equipment had a home immediately and could commence with contract services ready for Christmas sales.

The impact (key achievements):

The impact of the project thus far has generated approx. 20% more turnover to the business. Increased our wage bill by approximately 20% and provided more flexibility for employees in terms of regular work as opposed to more seasonal. We are now contract disgorging more of our customers' wine than our own. Last year we purchased grapes from neighbouring smaller vineyards as they usually have to send their grapes away to be processed. This is the first time we could offer this as previously we outsourced our pressing.

How is the new approach being sustained:

The investment is self-sustaining as it thrives on the success of our English wines and the sales of our neighbouring vineyards too. I was always concerned after the pandemic that the sales luxury products like our sparkling wine may decrease. Therefore becoming a contracting business would add another revenue stream. So far sales aren't decreasing and our service industry is growing too.

Rob Corbett, Castlewood Vineyards owner, said: 'IRF funding gave our small scale winery the support we needed at a crucial period in our development. Our growth was being hindered by outsourcing certain aspects of production. Now everything is fully in-house we can not only respond quickly to our own demand but also offer services to other small scale drinks wineries experiencing the same challenges'.

AND

'I'd like to say a huge thank you to the amazing team that delivered the IRF funding. The turnaround and execution of this funding was so helpful enabling us to make use of our equipment in order to deliver contract customers their products in time for Christmas. The flexibility and transparency of the whole process made the application process very comprehensive to navigate. The ability to purchase second hand equipment also made this project viable for us - brand new would have not been affordable. Help from the IRF East Devon team was readily available leading to no delays and frustration which you often find with grant funding. Thank you!'

www.castlewoodvineyard.co.uk