

# Pruning

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Terry Bates of the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Fredonia has done some research on the machine as well, and Bob and Dawn Betts of Westfield have been using the machine on their grape farm and have found that it helps in their grape fields. They have been able to trim more grapes in a shorter amount of time, spraying of the fruit is less frequent, and it has increased vineyard efficiency.

"The machine can't do it all, the grapes still need to be hand pruned, but it's very efficient," said Betts. The Betts have used the machine on their farm and have adjusted its many little cutters to their needs.

"Its a good thing it is adjustable, then we can make it work the way we want to." added Betts. "It takes a lot of time to learn, but it changes easily," he said.

Dawn Betts said she spends at least an hour a day out in the field with her husband learning how to use the machine, and said "it does take a lot of time to learn."

She also does trimming after the pruning machine goes down the row, and suggested to farmers who do trim to get rid of the little trimmers and buy a pair or pruner with long handles, it makes the job much easier and quicker. The couple also claim that cutting brush between rows has been cut way down because the machine chops the vines into tiny pieces.

"It just makes the job so much easier, it just takes time and it takes practice to learn how to use it."

"There is a lot of potential with this machine, and no two farms would run it the same," says Joy. "They have to adapt to the situation."

Thomas G. Davenport, Director of Viticulture at the National Grape Cooperative, Inc., said, in a written communication, that "We see continual decline in both the skill and availability of pruning labor while the cost continues to increase. In addition, we face an increased regulatory environment that may also impact the supply and cost of pruning labor in the near future," said Davenport. He added that through research, they are working toward providing farmers with tools that need to manipulate their crop potential throughout any season to maximize yields of mature grapes. This includes using the pruning machine.

In a nut shell, this pruning machine makes the job more effective, leaving vines needed for good spring growth, and hopefully a bigger, heavier grape crop in the future.

Through research, it has shown that farmers can save money each season by adding mechanical pruning to their grape farming method. It is also suggested that farmers approach mechanical pruning a little at a time, because if it isn't working for a particular farm, there will be a long way to bounce back from. If the process doesn't fit the need, it could destroy the entire farm. It should always be used sparingly.

"It will be interesting to see how far the machine goes," said Joy. "It will be a lot of trial and error."

Farmers who need additional information can contact Jim Joy or Thomas G. Davenport at the National Grape Cooperative Inc. at 326-5200.

*Comments can be sent to editorial@observertoday.com*