

## FARMING COMMENT AUGUST 5TH 2010 by Roger White of Yearlstone Vineyard

So Geoff did it. He braved the Dragon's Den and came out with at least part of his reputation for being an astute businessman intact. And he got Duncan Bannantine to invest.

All in all, for those readers who had nothing better to do than watch the telly that week, Pebblebed Vineyard near Topsham, and English fizz in general, came out pretty well from the prime time grilling, ( though I'm not sure many of the audience, let alone his fellow vineyard owners judging by our group e-mail **quite** got the way the plan was going to make any money...) So as a good friend to Geoff ( and sometime media adviser to his appearance ) here it is stripped of the TV Hackery.

Buy a piece of land. Say 5 acres. Plant with the classic Champagne varieties – Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier ( as so many others are doing up and down the country – beginning with the famous Sussex vineyard Nyetimber and it's 200 acres and counting ). Divide up the plots into quarter-acres and flog them one by one for £10,000 to people who

- love fizz
- are quite well off

In return they get a few hundred bottles of English bubbly with their own name on the label every year, plus the right to wander the vines, and join in the growing/winemaking process if they wish. Total = £200,000. Ah, all very well I hear you say. But can he make a profit? The answer is – to begin with – no. All the kitty will be swallowed up buying the land, planting it and the labour over the ten years to grow the grapes, and the expensive process of making bubbly in true Champagne method ( as all English fizz is ).

But. Here's the beauty of the Dragons Den, even though it probably didn't survive the savaging of Deborah Meaden and the enthusiasm of Mr Bannantine. AFTER the ten years is up, you end up owning the land ( for free having paid for it ), and with the initial costs of planting up all covered. The NEXT ten years of flogging off the quarter-acres will be very profitable indeed! Phew. If we live that long!

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Our own fizzes from 2009 are coming along nicely. As indeed are the prospects for a wonderful vintage this year. The vines haven't looked so heavily laden and happy since 2006. The Alice Stapleton touch ( helping out for the second year ) is evident in the neatly tucked trimmed and topped rows lapping up the warmth. We probably won't hit the target of 10 tons, but may not be far off it. Our contracted sister vineyard at Cannington is now restored fully to health and may give us 5. 2010 is going to be a vintage year – for grape growers in the South West. Planning for the winery season starts now!

Roger White  
Yearlstone Vineyard

NB Pebblebed Vineyard near Topsham is a member with Yearlstone of the Devon Wine Week group. Pebblebed wines are made at Yearlstone including the pink fizz tasted on the Dragons Den show.