

RELYING ON THE FIRST BUD

Mike and Dana Killinger are developing a vineyard and winery on their farm on Cottonwood Road about 13 miles east of Treynor. Mike reported that they are now producing four wines, Edelweiss, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Raspberry; and they have plans for four more, Sunset Blush, Golden Delicious, Dry Apple, and Semi-sweet Apple. Mike explained grape growing and wine production requires a lot of investment of time and capital before any result of the efforts can be realized. They have about 2,000 grape vines planted, and it takes three years before production of grapes. Wildlife such as rabbits and deer and drifting herbicides like 2-4-D can damage growing grapes. Natural hazards of frosts, freezes, and drought can severely impact production. Mike explained that a grape vine can produce three buds for leaf and fruit growth. The first bud produces the best grapes. If a frost injures this bud a second will appear that can produce grapes of lesser quality. If this bud is damaged by cold weather, the vine will produce a third bud. This is the last attempt for the vine to survive and no fruit will be produced. Mike said he purchases grapes from area grape growers to assure wine production. There are about 45 members of the Western Iowa Grape Growers Association and the Iowa Grape Growers Association who have about 50 acres of vineyards in the Loess Hills area. Mike and Dana are developing The Whispering Hills Vineyards on their farm not only as a means of income, but also as a place for the public to visit for education, wine tasting, and entertainment. Mike is a farmer, an educator, a coach, a computer programmer and now working to be a full time vintner.