



The Way to Grow: An Electronic Weigh Bill System

By Angela MacRae

Who could have imagined that harvest data for the entire Ontario grape growing industry would go from faxes on odd bits of paper to an electronic system in one season? The Grape Growers of Ontario (GGO) and their partner, The Strategem Group, had a vision.

They envisioned a system where data about the grapes harvested in every vineyard across the province could be entered online. "That was the feat we accomplished," explains Strategem President Robert Ykema.

Prior to 2007, the wine processors completed weigh bills in triplicate and faxed them to the GGO. They sent a copy to the grower and kept a copy for themselves. Trouble was, everybody used a different version of this form and most faxed them in at the last minute. The grower's copy frequently went missing, leaving them with no formal record of their crop sale. This created chaos and many late hours at the GGO. It was clear that the GGO's internal standalone system needed a major overhaul.

The new system has carved weeks off the effort. It has greatly reduced errors and provides all users with accurate information about the harvest.

Winery staff now enter data from the bins on each delivery truck into SETGO, an electronic weigh bill system. (SETGO is an acronym for Strategem Electronic Tracking for Grape Growers of Ontario.) The growers provide the vineyard and block identifications, as well as the variety.

How well is the new system able to track and display all the relevant information? Mrs. Moyer, a Niagara Region grower, answered, "I open the web page and my info is there.... It's magic!"

"With SETGO, the process for tracking harvest data across Ontario is being standardized."

— Dave Mines
Andrew Peller Ltd.

The magic behind the system is the teamwork of the GGO and their software development partner, The Strategem Group of St. Catharines. Key users like Dave Mines, Manager Grower Relations and Grape Supply at Andrew Peller Ltd. in Niagara-on-the-Lake, worked extensively with the team to define system requirements. They reviewed numerous weigh bill formats to define the data for the web-based system.

SETGO introduced a standardized, online format that

captures real time harvest data, providing dramatic improvements in payment reconciliation and security for the food supply chain. The system interface has the familiarity of a generic weigh bill and is very easy to use.

Mines remarked, "With SETGO, the process for tracking harvest data across Ontario is being standardized. That's the biggest benefit and we're all for it."

Julie Dixon, Special Projects Analyst at the GGO, explains that growers can check the system for an interim answer to the question 'How much have I sold?' "They can monitor their crop value all the way through the harvest season." She added, "Building an electronic weigh bill system to track the 2007 harvest was a huge feat." A total of 172 wineries and 520 growers used SETGO in its first season, entering over 5,000 weigh bills.

Dixon notes that "We are the first in the commodity field to be able to trace from the consumer product back to the origin. We want to continue pushing the envelope."

Curtis Fielding, General Manager at Fielding Estate Winery in Beamsville, praised the system. "SETGO keeps us organized and is quicker to use than the old system. It has made things much easier for the cellar staff, the winemaking team, and management. The tracking of grapes is critical all the way down the line and is getting more critical by year due to food safety. Less paperwork is always better and being more organized during harvest pays off."

"It has made things much easier for the cellar staff, the winemaking team, and management."

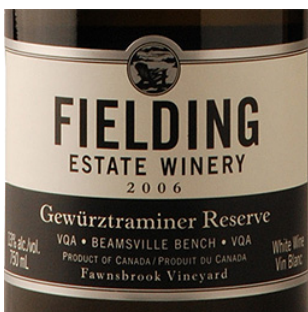
— Curtis Fielding
Fielding Estate Winery

Strategem and the GGO provided training sessions throughout Ontario during the month of August 2007. During that time they visited large and small users alike to provide hands-on support for the new system. Strategem issued a detailed user guide and a 7/24 phone line with live support. A total of three support calls were received over the entire harvest and each issue was easily resolved.

The accomplishment is a system integrator's dream come true. After the initial brainstorming efforts were reviewed, evaluated, and tested, the system specifications were set by mid-June. By mid-August, initial programming was complete, and training and load testing had started. On September 1, 2007, the test data was wiped clean and the system went live. SETGO performed flawlessly.

In addition, The Strategem Group was part of the team that received the 2007 Ontario Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. The GGO and its partners Agricorp and Strategem were recognized for their contributions to the GGO's electronic vineyard management and traceability system.

Strategem's expertise in the mail room industry, where they specialize in track and trace systems, contributed to their strength for developing SETGO. Since Brock University in St. Catharines implemented Strategem's bar-coding and web-based system, Purchasing Manager Chuck MacLean can say with pride, "Not one package has been lost."



For the Ontario wine industry, every bin of harvested grapes has been accurately accounted for. Strategem Vice President Ian Lawrence commented on the relevance of SETGO to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's announcement on 'Made in Canada' food labelling guidelines. "SETGO gives transparency to the Ontario wine making process. We can now track the wine on the shelf back to the specific rootstock and vineyard."