

COLD HOLLOW CIDER MILL

Introduction

Cold Hollow Cider Mill is a long-established Vermont family business that is the largest maker of fresh cider in the Northeast, producing more than a million gallons a year.

Its cider, pressed mostly from locally grown McIntosh apples, is also considered to be amongst the best in the nation for its sweet and tart taste.

The cider mill is a popular tourist destination with more than 350,000 visitors a year. You can watch cider production using age-old methods, sample fresh cider and other products made with it, and browse through the mill's extensive offerings of specialty food products, novelties and gift items.

Open year-round, seven days a week, Cold Hollow Cider Mill is located off I-89 at Exit 10, 3 miles north on Route 100, and is open to both the general public and tour groups.

A visit to Cold Hollow Cider Mill is to take a step back in time, to the days of labor-intensive farming practices. Those same methods are still in use today, making a visit here a memorable experience.

Although cider production continues throughout the year, fall is the big season when most of the apples are picked and at their best, ready for immediate pressing and processing.

The cider mill is an especially popular destination for tour groups that can see and sample a slice of Vermont farm life and learn about the cider-making process firsthand. You'll also find an astonishing array of cider spin-off products – such as jellies, mustards and confectionery – and can stock up on inexpensive gift items for friends and family.

The quaint early-1800s classic Vermont farmhouse attached to a barn (that was once a dairy farm) is the idyllic setting for Cold Hollow Cider Mill. It has been adapted and added to over time to make it one of the largest farm operations in the state.

The history of Cold Hollow Cider Mill dates back to 1974. It was started by former owners Eric and Francine Chittenden – descendants of Vermont's first governor Thomas Chittenden – who lived on another dairy farm in Bakersfield, Vermont. The farm was located near the base of the Cold Hollow Mountains, from which the current mill takes its name.

They gave up dairy farming after a difficult first year, and instead began pressing apple cider for local friends with a press they had procured. Soon the business began to grow.

With a vision of greater things, the Chittendens decided they wanted to become a major tourist attraction and produce cider in large quantities to sell wholesale to supermarkets. But they knew they could not achieve their dream in their remote location in Bakersfield.

So they looked for a new spot. After a statewide search and studying traffic density maps, they settled on the current location on Route 100 between Waterbury and Stowe because it was the busiest tourist traffic route in the state.

In 1976, they purchased the old Gibbs dairy farm in Waterbury Center, and operated the business until they sold it in 2000. The Chittendens continue to live just 2,000 feet away in a house they built on their lot on the shores of Waterbury Reservoir.

Enter new owners Paul and Gayle Brown who took over and have continued to expand the business. They were previously involved in the ski industry in Vermont, and were looking for a business to buy. The timing was perfect for both former and present owners, and allowed the cider mill operation to continue unchecked.

Today, the cider mill is a thriving business. It has expanded in size well beyond its original farmhouse and barn with several additions that include a Jelly Room – much like a maple sugar house – two large cold storage rooms (one for apples, the other for finished product), two press rooms, and a large bottling facility.

The main pressroom used for viewing the pressing of cider is the big attraction where a 1920's hydraulic press still uses the traditional "rack and cloth" method of pressing cider. Each year, more than 7 million apples are used in the process. After the apples are inspected, they are washed one final time, go up an elevator to a high-speed grinder

where they are ground into a mash called pomace. Pomace contains every part of the apple, including the stems, seeds and skins.

The pomace is then pumped through a tube and then laid out flat on a heavy-duty cheese cloth laying on the press cart. The cloth is then folded over and a plastic rack laid over the top. The process is repeated 18 times, and then the press cart is rolled in place over the hydraulic press. Up to 2,500 pounds per square inch of pressure is applied, squeezing all the juice out (apples are 85 percent juice). The discarded pomace is used as livestock feed and as compost.

A video of the pressroom process is also shown for visitors when the pressroom is not in operation.

Apples used at the cider mill come primarily from the Champlain Valley on both sides of the Vermont-New York border, where the soils and climate are considered ideal for growing the McIntosh apples most-favored for cider. McIntosh apples comprise about 80 percent of the cider mill's production. The other 20 percent of apples used include Cortland, Empire, Delicious, Rome, Spartan and Niagara, but it is the McIntosh apple that is most favored for its "snap," sweet and tart taste.

Much of the cider produced is then pasteurized to remove any risk of E-Coli contamination and is then stored, bottled and shipped to suppliers. The cider mill uses its own cider to produce a cider jelly – boiled and evaporated in the cider mill's Jelly Room in much the same way maple syrup is made.

The cider – and Vermont maple syrup – is also used to flavor a wide array of distinctive products made by the cider mill. Products include mustards, jellies, salsas and humus.

The cider mill also uses its cider to make its famous apple cider donuts that were voted one of the top four donuts in the nation by Gourmet magazine in its March 2000 issue. You can see the donuts being made and eat them fresh. It it's peak fall season, the cider mill makes 700 dozen donuts a day, such is their popularity and demand.

There is also a natural foods bakery on-site that is a big hit with visitors, making pumpkin rolls, apple cheddar squares, maple cream cheese pockets, and of course, apple pie.

The cider mill also has a dizzying array of Vermont specialty foods for sale – including maple syrup, spaghetti sauce, cheese and candy – as well as products made outside the state.

The Honey Corner features a honeycomb rack (behind glass for safety) that shows how bees process pollen into honey. Bees are an important part of the cider process, for they pollinate apple orchards.

Across the driveway is The Connection, where you will find the Grand View Winery outlet store that offers tastings of many delicate fruit and berry wines, and hard cider. (The winery -based in East Calais - also offers tours and tastings and is well worth a visit). The Connection also offers cosy, comfortable clothing from the Vermont Flannel Company, and there is a room devoted to Christmas gift items.

The cider mill does an extensive mail order business, also accessible via the Internet, of many of the products on sale.

The cider mill is open year-round, seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. during the summer months.

For more information about Cold Hollow Cider Mill, call 802-244-8771, or visit its Web site at: coldhollow.com