

"There's definitely that farmer helping farmer thing," says Cynthia. "When something goes bump in the night at harvest, if you have a press that goes down or you are short tanks, there's often a rally call within the region. Winemaking is a competitive sport, but I think there's this belief that if you help your neighbor, and their quality goes up, it only helps yourself."

As she and her husband cultivated rows of Malbec, Cabernet Franc and Merlot vines in the rich soil of the Naramata Bench, they started referring to the neighboring wineries as the "co-opetition."



That sense of business community inspired the Naramata Bench Wineries Association ten years ago, the first of its kind in the Okanagan. Winery owners realized they could gain more from a collective marketing effort than trying to blaze a trail of awareness on their own. As the years passed, they ended up doing something larger than simply selling their individual vintages. They branded their region.

Today 24 of the 29 Bench wineries are part of the association. Pooling their funds, they each pay a yearly flat fee based on the number of cases they produce. Meanwhile, building on advertising efforts like a map for thirsty tourists seeking tasting rooms, the association created the tagline, "A story in every bottle."



"Collaboration is really how they set about to compete and market this region," says Tina Baird, marketing director at the Naramata Bench Wineries Association. "Instead of each winery going to Vancouver trying to get into the marketplace, what if we take our wines together as a group, sharing the expenses of venues?"

That question led to Spring Release in Vancouver, a popular annual event that now attracts 400 consumers and 400 trade professionals, all eager to sample the new barrels of fermented elixirs from the Bench. Loyal followings of association-organized wine tastings are growing in Victoria and Calgary.

Being a collective also allows the wineries to make a bigger statement when lobbying the government to change laws. Recently a convoy of tractors slowed