

Merry Christmas 2004 and
Happy 2005 New Year
From
Walden Woods Farm

End-of-year and Seasons Greetings. We always begin this annual newsy-letter with -- it has been 'another busy year' and ask 'where has it gone?'; this year is no exception. We really don't have a clue about how today can be only a few days before 25th December! So, if it is nearly Christmas and then another New Year will begin, we wish you the merriest of holidays, regardless of your geographic and seasonal influences – cold and snowy or hot and dry or wet and humid. It is summer here and should be warm and probably dry in Armidale; but, we are 'praying' for summer rain without hail, of course.

At home and our farm work. The Walden Woods Farm has again kept Doug and Mister totally occupied this last 12 months, with the older and new vineyard being the focus. In March/April Doug's parents, Heather and Ray, visited us in Armidale for the first time; it was a wonderful visit with delightful autumn weather. Around the house, we have done some more work on edible gardens, with dashes of flowers for interest, colour and companion planting. I bought a few new flamboyant iris again. Many of the winter vegetables have self-sown and re-grown – cabbage, broccoli, pac tsoi, parsley, borage, oakleaf lettuce, dill, English spinach, etc Their being independent has helped, as we are just too busy with establishing the vineyards to focus on vegetables and herbs. One long hot chilli plant produced so many pods that Nadine strung them into two red threads about a metre/yard long for drying; they decorate the kitchen - hanging near the AGA stove. Maybe next year we will have more time for the spring/summer edible garden, including some stone walls and drip-watering lines. We harvested our onion crop on the longest day – 22 December (see photo). The original fruit trees are a year older and right now are producing summer cherries, nectarines, plums; but, the first-time peaches seem to have fruitfly! This next winter (June-August)

we hope to give the orchard more attention too, particularly because we will have Isa Brown chickens and Guinea fowl running free among the fruit trees from February. We buy 'day-old' poultry so that they meet our BFA (Biological Farmers of Australia) organic certification requirements of being 'clean' when they enter our property.



Vines to wine. Last year we wrote about acquiring two Indian Runner ducks from friends Max and Margaret; well, we have to report that two months ago a fox took them one night after the high electric tape around the House vineyard broke. In replacement, we have just ordered 10 'day-old' Embden geese (Embden are good graziers of grasses but supposedly will not eat grapes! Will they end up on the dinner table?). As 2004 began, the *Pinot grigio* vines were healthy and the bunches [shaped like the African continent] of grapes were developing; then, a freak hailstorm hit for only 5 minutes and half the grapes were lost! On leap-year 29th February with the help of 10 UNE colleagues and local neighbours, we picked our 2004 *Pinot grigio* vintage of 418 kilograms of grape bunches [our first commercial crop].

Pre-dawn the next morning, we drove the tiptruck to Wright-Robertson at Glencoe, where the bunches were destemmed and pressed before reducing to 220 litres of juice. The white wine-making process of cooling, adding yeast and then fermenting and racking-off (4-5 times) the developing wine from lees (sediment) took several months. We bottled in mid-August (see photo – what is the bottle count?*) and began selling certified organic wine [light, crisp and only 10.5 % alcohol].



We designed a label, a business card and a postcard (see photo) for marketing. Nadine is 'chief marketing and finance officer' and Doug is principal viticulturalist. The UNE Booloominbah bar and restaurant initially bought two dozen bottles and soon asked for another two dozen, but we had only 10 bottles left! Within a few days, the Bool service staff were telling Nadine that people were specifically asking for Walden Woods Farm *Pinot grigio* for lunch by glass and bottle [remember the low alcohol level]. Bool is our only commercial outlet; and will be again for 2005 vintage. Otherwise, UNE colleagues and Donald Road neighbours bought wine directly from us by the bottle or half-case. Because we had so little wine this year, no one could buy a dozen! Some people are already asking for orders and a waiting list for the 2005 vintage.



Also, 'sorry' about no wine for our US family and friends; the new US/Australia 'free' trade agreement opened a door for Australian wine sales but then US anti-terrorist laws closed the same door and made wine shipping too complex and time consuming and too costly for small growers. We are quite active in SNEVA (our Southern New England Vignerons Association); Doug is now treasurer. Additionally, Doug along with about 20 other local growers began an ongoing NSW TAFE studies program in Agriculture/horticulture (Viticulture) in June. I will join the wine appreciation, marketing and berry sensory evaluation aspects in 2005.

Our 'slowfood society'. A number of Donald Road Slowfood Informal Society Luncheons for 10/12+ people were held during 2004, with several outdoor mid-day woodfired pizza long lunches under our roofed rustic BBQ area (see photo; roof up late February) and two indoor fancy wine-tasting meals. The **pizza lunches** were: January for New Year; April for Heather and Ray; May for Doug's birthday; and, September for a SNEVA-members social gathering. After its introduction in 2003, the now famous pizza of thick double cream spread on thin dough and topped with parchment-thin, translucent prosciutto ham slices with fresh bits of wild rocket scattered on top after cooking is everyone's favourite!



The **fancy meals** with white tablecloth were: 1) a March 11-course, silver service luncheon for Heather and Ray with seven *Pinot gris/grigio* wines - matched but blind-tasted from Alsace, France; Kamptel, Osterreich; South Island, New Zealand; and Yarra Valley, Victoria (Australia); and, 2) an October mid-

morning, blind and isolated sensory evaluation (20 point scoring of appearance, nose and palate) of six *Pinot gri/s/gio* wines [including our 2003 and 2004 Walden Woods] followed by several brunch-fingerfood-nibbles.

Nadine and UNE. 2004 was a different UNE** year for Nadine. I was no longer Foundation Faculty Associate Dean (Teaching & Learning); so, I carried a 'full' undergraduate and postgraduate teaching load in first semester (late February to early July) for the first time since joining UNE in 1998. I continued to coordinate and teach a unit externally in the EdD, refined and offered my passion ECE unit 'Young Children Exploring Their World' (sciences with care for our surroundings!), and also worked in our initial ECE profession unit with intertwined academic literacies. Two Master of Education research/honours students, that I am principal supervisor for, submitted their theses for examination and both are now ready to graduate. From 1st July, I began eight months of UNE study leave with the major project of creating and writing, some not all, a book which is currently titled *Foodcycles and Families... musings about the edible past and present*; seven chapters are now framed and well underway. Two smaller projects have been: 1) attending and presenting at the OMEP World Congress held in Melbourne in July [OMEP is the world organisation of 'preschool' education linked to UNICEF and UN]; and, 2) continuing team leadership of the UNE Teaching Development Grant Project on understanding beginning students' attrition - a paper was presented in Malaysia and the final report document is nearly complete. Even though I was on study leave, other tasks were: the *Honouring our Tertiary Teaching* book that I compiled and edited was finally launched two weeks ago; I was on the course review panel for our combined degrees [such as Bachelor of General Studies/Bachelor of Teaching (Primary)]; and, a commissioned [Early Childhood Australia association] article on childhood obesity, '*Challenging Consuming Lifestyles of Children... being able and active with appetite in Australia*', for the *Australian Health Consumer* online journal of

Consumers' Health Forum of Australia at: www.chf.org.au was written.

Keep fit and well. Finally, keep well and keep in touch as 2005 unfolds. Our points of contact remain as before: 469 Donald Road, Armidale, New South Wales 2350 AUSTRALIA; phone – 02 or 2 (international) 6772 8966; and, the email is: dhume@northnet.com.au

Fond seasonal greetings, Nadine and Doug

* 2004 vintage bottle count was 144 or 12 dozen cases.

** UNE – The University of New England