

WINE GRAPE INFORMATION FOR PENNSYLVANIA AND THE REGION

From Penn State Cooperative Extension

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Note: Yes, I know... this is way too much stuff to read. But I won't apologize because there is just so much good stuff going on in our industry these days. This is the busy meeting season and there is a lot going on out there. I hope you are able to attend selected meetings. It is a great way to learn and network. I just got back from Minnesota where the cold climate viticulture conference was sold out at 400+ and over 250 people attended a new grower session. We are talking Minnesota, folks! So grapes are on the move everywhere. It hardly makes sense but isn't it wonderful!

Report from Virginia

2006 Vintage Review for Pennsylvania: What went right and what went wrong (see attachment)

I was recently invited to speak at the Virginia Vineyards Association annual meeting in Charlottesville. First, let me say that VVA and the Virginia growers really have their act together. They put on an exciting and informative meeting over 3 days that featured excellent speakers and topics such as a Petit Manseng workshop and timely viticulture issues such as unripe flavors in Cab Franc and physiology of grape maturity. I was impressed by the organization by Dr. Tony Wolf and VVA to stage this meeting. The VA wine industry is on the go and I encourage people to visit vineyards in the state. I was asked to participate on a panel to give the vintage view from Pennsylvania. I have attached my notes on the subject which might be of interest to growers in the area. I can't help but note the tremendous variability in vintage conditions, mainly rainfall amounts during the growing season, even in our limited Mid-Atlantic region. There are very clear rain shadows that offer protected sites for some vineyards and a clear advantage over others. This should be an important part of the site selection process. The 2006 vintage had four parts - April and May were dry and cool > late June and July were wet and warm with storms > August and early September were dry and warm > Sept/Oct variably wet and dry. Even as deep into the season as mid to late September a streak of 7-10 days of sun would have made a huge difference to the quality of the vintage but it never

happened and the wines suffered a bit, especially the late reds. I would welcome your own comments about the vintage and what worked or did not work for your grapes and wines.

Petit Manseng (see attachment)

I became aware of Petit Manseng from visits to Virginia over the past few years. It is a white wine variety that comes from the Juracon region of SW France. It is a versatile grape that when fully ripe has exotic aroma and flavors that are very appealing. But its viticultural characteristics may be its most attractive features. Growers say that it has a very thick skin and loose cluster which makes it highly resistant to disease. It can hang late into the season which allows it to make a delicious, rich and concentrated late harvest wine. Dr. Bruce Zoecklein, enologist at Virginia Tech outlined the features of PM. He explained the importance of achieving balance on the palate between structure and texture. It is a high brix, high malic, high phenolic grape with small berry size. Finding a proper balance between sweetness and acid is the secret to making this grape shine. Is it a potential white variety for Pennsylvania? I would certainly like to see it tested here. It is part of the USDA NE-1020 wine grape variety trial and will be planted at FREC in Biglerville. I have a feeling the results will be pleasing to winemakers.

Cabernet Franc (see attachment) - John Weygandt, Stargazer Vineyard, PA

I keep wondering what is the signature red variety that will help the Mid-Atlantic region to establish a quality identity with consumers and critics. Winter injury is the Achilles Heel of most of the vinifera varieties and, among those, it appears that only Cabernet Franc may have the cold hardiness to provide consistently rewarding results. I was encouraged when Michel Rolland stated in a seminar last summer that he thought Cabernet Franc had good potential for the region. But where are the examples, either here to offer encouragement or abroad to offer an example to follow? David Schildknecht, who evaluates wines for The Wine Advocate also offers encouragement for CF. Most of the wines I taste have problems with ripeness, mostly in the form of green, bell pepper and underripe flavors, structure and texture. Until we can figure out how to fix this in the vineyard, I'm not sure how far we can push the variety. I believe the cure can only be in the vineyard. Any effort to treat methoxypyrazines in the cellar will be too intrusive and will upset the delicate balance of the wine. I was not able to attend the Cabernet Franc session but John Weygandt, owner and wine maker at Stargazer Vineyard in Chester County was there and took copious notes which we offer to you. I would like to thank John very much for sharing his notes with us.

Procumbent (droopy) Canopies

Jeanette Smith of VineSmith Vineyard Consulting sees a lot of vineyard in her role as grower relations representative for Chateau Morrisette, one of Virginia's biggest wineries. CM buys grapes from 16 different vineyards and Jeanette visits all of them on a regular basis. Of course some of the growers, like John and Ruth Saunders of Silver Creek Orchard are very innovative. They have developed a double trunk high-wire head

trained, cane pruned system that has worked very successfully for them. Trained at 64" it takes advantage certain varieties like Petit Verdot and Chambourcin that have a more droopy growth habit. I worked with hanging systems in Oregon and found that in certain situations they could produce fruit of comparable quality to VSP at much reduced development and operating costs. It only has one wire and requires less fussy canopy management but shoot positioning is still required. Because the fruit sits on the top of the canopy it is generally well exposed to the sun which is a good position for cooler regions but subject to burn in hot climates. A study at Oregon State comparing the hanging to VSP found that the only significant difference was elevated phenolic levels on the hanging system. So maybe it's worth a try in some applications. Between row spacing must be wider to accommodate the cascading foliage.

Frost Protection with water

Joyce Rigby, a well-respected vineyard consultant in North Carolina told the audience about a vineyard that is using Netafim microjet misting technology that utilizes existing drip irrigation equipment to overhead irrigate for frost protection. The system uses much less water than the standard solid set systems and accomplishes the same goal of providing a coating of ice over tender new green shoot growth during spring frost season. The water releases heat while freezing and provides a coat of insulating ice. The manufacturer claims it is effective to 24F. It requires 20 gpm of water supply, in this case from a pond. Disadvantages are the cost, \$5000/ac to install and it does not work under windy conditions. If one considers the potential crop loss on valuable wine varieties this may be a worthwhile investment.

Vineyard Labor (see attachment)

At my advisory committee meeting I always ask my grower/advisors what are their most pressing issues in the vineyard. It seems that one of the top concerns is finding skilled labor to do critical tasks such as canopy management, pruning, harvest, etc. Let's make no mistake about it, the quality of wine can only be as good as the people doing the work. In order to achieve consistent product quality there has to be a skilled labor force to carry out the instructions and philosophy of the owner/manager. It is simply not practical to train new people to prune every year and expect consistently high quality results. I have suggested that smaller vineyards combine resources to find and retain a skilled labor force. It is easier said than done. In the west, seasonal labor is widely available in agriculture but not here. Growers need to be more determined and resourceful. As in many aspects of their vineyard, the owners of Black Ankle Vineyard, Ed Boyce and Sarah O'Herron, are creative and aggressive in their pursuit of quality in the vineyard. They have successfully navigated the H2A system to procure a consistent and reliable source of labor for their vineyard. Sarah has provided an explanation of the program and how they made it work for them at BAV. I am very grateful to her for sharing their experience with other growers.

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Labor and Industries regulates the contract labor industry in

the state. Labor contractors are not my preferred source of skilled vineyard labor but there is little doubt about their importance to agriculture and their possible value to our growers. My experience with contractors has been good and bad. Some exploit their workers shamelessly for profit while others provide a valuable service and treat their workers fairly and with dignity and respect. If you engage a contract laborer you want to make sure you find and hire the latter and that he or she is fully bonded and licensed and has a good reputation. Remember, if things go wrong for the contractor the liability may come to visit you. You must be wary and responsible when dealing with labor contractors. But if you find a good one, you have found a great resource.

The Root of the Matter: Dr. David Smart on Vine Roots (see attachment)

Dr. David Smart was an invited speaker at the recent Maryland Grape Growers Association and Maryland Wine Association joint annual meeting which many of my comments about Virginia would apply to Maryland as well. We need to be careful in Pennsylvania not to fall too far behind our neighbors. As growers we do not consider the roots often enough. We fuss with the canopy and crop and diseases and pests but often fail to acknowledge that all of what we see above ground is completely dependent on what goes on below the surface. Water and nutrients are the life's blood of the vine and it all originates in the soil. It is amazing how little understood many of the processes and nature of soil are among vines. Dr. Smart's research program focuses on rootstock root physiology and soil nutrient cycling. His current interests relate to the physiological process of root aging and population dynamics of roots under field conditions (web site copy). If we gain a better understanding and appreciation of the vital role of roots, rootstocks and soils we can certainly grow a healthier, more productive vine that produces high quality grapes.

Pesticide Highlights for Private Applicators

This is a very dry topic but no less essential for every farmer including all grape growers. Included in this January 2007 issue are articles on plastic pesticide container recycling, worker protection standards checklist, record keeping requirements for private applicators, sample pesticide safety fact sheets, and pesticide spill response information. This is all core credit material but oh so important, not just from a health and safety standpoint but also legal because you must be in compliance. You can find the Jan2007 issue at www.pested.psu.edu/resources/news/np107.pdf.

New Grower Workshop (see attachment)

A new grower workshop will be offered on March 21 from 8-4 at the Farm and Home Center in Lancaster, PA. This full-day workshop is designed to assist new growers and people considering planting a vineyard to understand the basic concepts and practices in vineyard development, economics, grape markets and current industry conditions. This is

an excellent primer for people who want to own a commercial wine grape vineyard. If supplemented by individual study and/or viticulture training it will prepare any person to develop and operate a vineyard. Dr. Joe Fiola has 20 years of extension and research experience with wine grapes in NJ and MD. Mark Chien has been the extension viticulture educator at Penn State since 1999 and was a commercial wine grower on LI and Oregon for 20 years. Program, information and registration are in attachment. Please pre-register.

Vineyard Development Workshop

The ideal supplement to the new grower workshop, this meeting takes place in a vineyard and seeks to offer participants a close up view of how a vineyard is established by the growers who have actually done the work and written the checks. This is the hands-on, practical demonstration of how a vineyard is put into the ground. It is essential training for anyone who has a wish to grow high quality wine grapes. The Waltz Vineyard is one of the most respected in the state both for quality and profitability. Jan is the prototype self-taught wine grower who has paid attention to every detail in his vineyard development. Yes, he has made some mistakes but he learned from them and will share them with you. Nelson Stewart has developed vineyards in York County, Maryland and his most current project in Montgomery County with consultant Lucie Morton is one of the best vineyards in the ground using high density, best clones and rootstocks and drip irrigation. These are model vineyards. Michael Schmidt owns Spec Trellising, supplier of vineyard materials to the industry. He will show you what you need. Program, information, registration are attached to this message. Please pre-register by the as soon as possible.

Date: Tuesday, April 3rd, 2007
Time: Noon to 5 p.m.
Where: Waltz Vineyard, Manheim, PA
Cost: \$50
Note: Information and pre-registration will be sent out soon

Updated 2007 Regional Vit-Enol Events Calendar (see attachment)

Please note Grape Expectations in New Jersey on February 24 at the Forsgate Country Club in Jamesburg, NJ. Topics will include disease control, Petit Manseng with Mike Henny from Horton Cellars, wine analysis and more

Wineries Unlimited, the largest wine meeting and trade show of the year has moved from Lancaster to the Valley Forge Convention Center in King of Prussia. Dates are March 6-9 and a great program has been assembled including a silent and live auction to support American Society for Enology and Viticulture Eastern Section graduate scholarships. There is a winery design and planning workshop on March 6 that is essential for anyone planning to open a commercial winery. You can find a full program and registration at <http://www.vwm-online.com/>.

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