



September, 2011

Dear New Wine Grower:

Thank you for the interest you have expressed in planting a commercial wine vineyard in Pennsylvania. If you continue, you will join an exciting new agricultural industry in Pennsylvania. While still small compared to the traditional commodity crops like dairy and agronomic crops, it is one of two sectors of the ag economy (the other is ornamentals) that is currently growing. There is excellent viticultural and therefore high quality wine production potential among Pennsylvania's diverse growing regions. You will be part of establishing Pennsylvania as a respected and recognized wine region in the U.S.

The Pennsylvania wine and vineyard communities are experiencing unprecedented growth and success. There are currently about 2800 acres of wine grapes and over 150 bonded wineries (up from 45 in 2000) and many independent vineyards supporting them with grapes. It is in everyone's best interest that new growers get off to a good start. We all have a stake in the quality of every bottle of wine offered to wine consumers and critics. Towards that end, I have just a few suggestions for you. Note that these comments are directed towards individuals interested in developing a commercial wine grape vineyard.

The wine grape program at Penn State was created to delivery educational opportunities and resources to commercial wine growers in the Commonwealth. This is done primarily through news and information materials delivered electronically and through a variety of meetings and workshops. While site visits are an important part of the program it is important to note that the wine grape educator is not a consultant. That said, the program is available to all growers to answer questions and solve problems. An advisory committee consisting of growers, wine makers, Penn State faculty and extension members, and people from associated industries help to set the agenda and shape the wine grape program. The committee has representatives from all of Pennsylvania's wine growing districts and each of the major industry associations.

Most people who express an interest in starting a vineyard are currently professionals involved in other careers who cannot take 2-4 years off from their lives to go to school to learn about growing grapes. If you fit this description it means you have a lot of self-education in front of you. Fortunately, there is a tremendous amount of excellent information on the web and published materials. You will find enclosed a reading list, which I encourage you to examine closely. Most wine growers are self-taught, and while I believe it is best to have some formal training in plant and biological sciences and viticulture, it's not a prerequisite for success. Most anyone can grow a vine and once they are growing they are hard to kill. But to grow a vine that produces high quality grapes for wine takes a lot of knowledge and experience. We have particular challenges in this region such as winter injury and a complex of diseases and pests that arid regions do not have. It means we have to be much better growers to make fine wines. Please do extensive and focused reading during the winter months. This will be the foundation for the establishment of a successful vineyard and business.

Harrisburg Area Community College has started a 1-year certificate and 2-year associate's degree program in Viticulture and Enology. It is geared towards adult learners and available as an on-line offering supplemented with "grape camps" which serve the practical-demonstration needs of the curriculum. Bob Green is the program director.

These two references books are essential for a grower in Pennsylvania or the region:

- Wine Grape Production Guide for Eastern North America. Edited by Tony Wolf (see Information Resources list)
- I am currently writing a commercial vineyard development manual that would be very helpful to you. It should be published in the winter 2012. I'll keep you posted on its availability.

You can learn a lot just by coming to meetings. Besides the educational content you will meet a lot of grape growers and the people involved with extension and research in the region. The busy meeting season is January until March but there are wine and grape meetings around the region all year long. I strongly urge you to attend as many as you can. I publish an annual regional calendar of viticulture and enology events each fall and update it regularly.

Visit vineyards and wineries - vineyards because it will be your business, wineries because they will be your customers. Learn about how the business works and talk to people about the wine industry. I think you will find them very helpful. Go armed with a foundation of viticulture knowledge so vineyard owners will recognize that you are serious in your interest to start a vineyard. The winter is a good time to catch people as it's a slower season. Don't just visit in your neighborhood. Visit vineyards in Pennsylvania because they are our industry but also go to Long Island, Virginia and Ontario where some of the best wines are being produced. Ask good questions, observe closely and follow their examples. It will be the most enjoyable lessons you have ever experienced.

Examine yourself closely. Vineyards are a lot of work and they time a lot of time and effort. You will likely give up summer vacations and weekends. Vines are sensitive to disease and need to be sprayed on a regular basis. Vineyards also take a lot of money to develop, upwards of \$10-30,000 for an acre of top quality grafted *vinifera* vines, trellis, irrigation and fencing. Be ready for that. Do not overextend yourself. Always remember, this is supposed to be fun. And, profitable – treat your commercial vineyard enterprise as a serious business. Start small and get an idea of what's involved then grow into it. The moment you do not look forward to tending your vineyard is the beginning of the end and none of us can afford to grow bad wine.

Hopefully, the information included in this packet will direct you to resources that will provide the foundation of knowledge you need to make the best decisions possible before the first plant ever goes in the ground. There will be a direct correlation between the amount of study time you put in up front and the ultimate success and profitability of your vineyard. Get as much information as you can, synthesize it, seek good advice and then begin the process of making critical and educated decisions. There will be hundreds of them but each one deserves careful research and consideration. Do not take shortcuts in any aspect of your preparation or vineyard development. I guarantee that you will regret it and pay more in time, effort and expense later on to do it right. Extension agents are not consultants. I will do my best to help you in any way I can. You may want to consider hiring a vineyard consultant to hold your hand through the critical early development years.

Please contact me when you have more questions. I am a resource for information, but not a consultant. There are private consultants who can be on call for you when you need help, advice or encouragement. You are fortunate to be in the center of an extremely active research and education region for wine and grapes, please take full advantage of this situation. If you are the Erie region, Andy Muza in the Erie

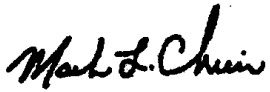
Cooperative Extension office and the Lake Erie Regional Grape Program (Penn State-Cornell) are excellent resources.

Denise Gardner is the extension enologist at Penn State. She is based in the food science department. She can assist you with your winery-winemaking needs.

It might help you to be on my viticulture e-mail newsletter list. If you are not, contact me and I will add your name. Also, you can check the Pennsylvania Wine Grape Network web site for news and information relevant to the wine community at <http://pawinegrape.com/>

Good luck and have fun!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark L. Chien". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark L. Chien
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