

2003 NORTH CAROLINA STATE REPORT to the SERA-IEG 14 COMMITTEE

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The 2003 Season

From planting time onward, every aspect of grape production has been impacted by bad weather this year. Delayed planting and/or poor early season growth due to excessively wet soils, poor fruit set due to cloudy, rainy conditions during bloom, excessive, often rank, vigorous growth of established vines, heavier than normal disease pressure, and reduced fruit quality all characterize this season.

Bunch Grape Research and Extension Efforts

A second extension agent grape production short course was offered through the Southern Region Small Fruit Consortium. The meeting was jointly planned and coordinated by Gerard Krewer (GA) and Andy Allen (NC) and held at Chateau Elan, in Braselton, GA, in December 2002. The course covered both muscadine (Krewer) and bunch grape (Allen) production issues. Attendees came from GA, SC, NC, TN, and AR.

The research vineyard established at the Upper Piedmont Research Station in Reidsville, NC, produced its first crop in 2003. Due to poor fruit set caused by rainy, cloudy conditions during bloom, severe bird-feeding damage, and berry losses caused by sour rot, only a few varieties will have enough good fruit to make wine.

One issue facing NC winegrape growers is excessive vigor. Most bunch grape vineyard acreage in NC is established in the Vertical Shoot Positioned (VSP) training system. This system is inadequate for the amount of vigor encountered by NC vineyards, requiring multiple hedgings and leaf pullings to maintain a well-illuminated fruiting zone in the canopy. A training system comparison study was initiated at a commercial vineyard in Yadkinville, NC to compare the VSP system with Smart-Dyson and Ballerina systems, which offer a more balanced vine and potentially higher yields.

A series of Vineyard Views were held during the summer. At these meetings growers and prospective growers meet at an established vineyard to discuss the current vineyard situation and various aspects of grape production.