

# SERA014 Progress Report 2005

## Viticulture and Enology in Tennessee

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## **2. Status of the Grape/Wine Industry:**

Late frosts in April and early May caused damage ranging from tip burn on new shoots to over 90% kill of primary buds, depending on variety and location. At harvest, yields in most vineyards were lower than in previous years - oftentimes in excess of 50 % less than anticipated. Harvest was difficult in many vineyards due to uneven ripening with primary and secondary clusters and clusters on laterals.

Rainfall varied considerably across the state. The Middle Tennessee Experiment Station received 0.6 inches of rain for the month of May followed by almost daily rainfall in much of June and July. Frequent rainfall midway through the growing season created a lot of disease pressure. One winery reported rain 17 days in a row in late June and early July. Most of East Tennessee received adequate rainfall through mid-August, while sections of Middle and West Tennessee experienced extended dry periods. In these areas, new vineyards that were not irrigated suffered reduced growth and, in some cases, vine death. Dry conditions during much of harvest allowed fruit to reach favorable sugar levels and lessened disease pressure.

Interest levels in establishing vineyards and wineries appears to be at an all-time high. Grape acreage increased an estimated 10% in 2005 pushing total vineyard acreage to over 525 acres. Traminette and Cynthiana make up a significant portion of the new plantings. Several new wineries are being planned.

## **3. University Activities:**

### **Dave Lockwood**

Grape root borer (*Vitacea polistiformis*) monitoring is continuing. Grape root borer trap counts were lower than in 2004. Five sites were selected for weekly monitoring - trapping adult males and checking for pupal cases under vines in the nematode treatment plots. A one year extension has been requested for the EPA Grape Root Borer Management grant.

Cooperative work with the University of Arkansas in screening advanced selections from their breeding program continues at three University of Tennessee experiment stations. The planting at the Middle Tennessee Experiment Station in Spring Hill (about 50 miles southwest of Nashville) was set in 2002. It contains thirteen candidates, five of which are named varieties. Considerable dieback over winter

occurred, probably as a result of overcropping the vines in 2004. In spite of this, it was still necessary to cluster thin most of the candidates severely to restrict crop load. Identical plantings having sixteen advanced selections were established in 2003 at the Highland Rim Experiment Station 30 miles north of Nashville and the Plateau Experiment Station 100 miles east of Nashville. Dieback of the vines at the Plateau Experiment Station was severe. Many of the vines had to be cut back to a single bud to find live tissue. Regrowth of these vines was substantial over the summer months

### **Bill Morris**

The Wines of The South regional wine competition was held for its third year in 2004. In the three years we have conducted this competition, the number of wine entries has increased by 58% (205 to 324). In 2005 the decision was made to include Oklahoma in the competition. This results in wineries from thirteen states being included in the competition. This past year we expanded our number of judges from twenty to twenty-five to accommodate the increased number of wines. Each year we continue to strive to obtain more judges from outside Tennessee. This year thirteen of the judges are from outside the state..

In 2004, 17% of the entries earned gold medals, 33.3% silver and 36.7% bronze. This compares very favorably with other national competitions (i.e. The Indy International Wine Competition awarded 13.4% gold, 28.9% silver and 23.85 bronze). In 2004 we had forty -five wineries enter from seven states compared to 27 wineries from seven states in 2002. This is an increase of 66.7% in the number of wineries entering the competition.

We enjoyed a very favorable article featuring the event in the Knoxville News Sentinel this past year, as well as several articles in University of Tennessee publications. We are expecting more growth in 2005 and are looking forward to an even bigger event.

## **Tony Johnston**

Tony has been back at Middle Tennessee State University for about a year following two years active duty with the military. Upon his return, Tony resumed his teaching activities and his work with the grape and wine industry. His return, however, was short-lived. On September 10, Tony returned to the military for a 120 day stint. This time, he will be in Cuba working on the detainee tribunals. He is scheduled to return in January, just in time to resume his teaching responsibilities for spring semester.

## **Tennessee Wine Festivals**

The second Tennessee Wine Festival was held on May 21 at the Nashville Super Speedway. The Wilson County Chamber of Commerce sponsored the event again. Eighteen wineries participated in the event. Along with tastings, seminars concerning wine appreciation and wine use were offered throughout the duration of the event. Approximately 4,000 people attended the event, up from the 3,000+ attendees at the 2004 festival. Plans are currently being formulated for the 2006 festival to be held at the same site and time

## **Grape and Wine Legislative Activities**

Bill Morris and Dave Lockwood were requested to meet with state legislators on numerous occasions to provide information on the grape/wine industry. We also were requested to meet with the Senate Ag Committee to provide information on the status of the industry and its contributions to the state's economy. Efforts were being made to modify the Grape/Wine Law, specifically to raise or eliminate the cap on the amount of wine that wineries could sell directly to the public at the wineries (currently the cap is 20,000 gallons) and to create some ongoing, funding specifically for research, education and promotion of grapes and wines within Tennessee. The proposed legislation was tabled and sent to a study committee. To date, two study sessions have been held with legislators to discuss the ramifications of such legislation.