

Viticulture and Enology in Tennessee
SERA-IEG14 Grape Exchange Group
2006 Annual Report

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Teaching, consultation with home and professional winemakers and grape producers

2. Status of the Grape/Wine Industry:

Interest levels in establishing vineyards and wineries continues to be high, although expansion of the grape/wine industry is relatively flat as compared to many other states (see below under "Legislative Activities" for an explanation). Tennessee currently has about 550 acres of grapes. Three wineries closed this past year - two due to retirements and one due to the death of the owner. One new winery opened its doors and several wineries are in the developmental stages with hopes of being opened within the next year.

The quantity and quality of the 2006 crop was down compared to last year. Fruit set was light and disease problems, especially black rot, was severe in some areas. Most parts of Tennessee experienced hot, dry conditions over the summer. However, rains at harvest caused a decline in fruit quality. This appeared to be more of a problem with American cultivars than with *viniferas*.

3. University Activities:

Dave Lockwood

Our grant on grape root borer control is expiring. This summer, several vineyards in East Tennessee were monitored to determine the period over which adult male grape root borers were present. Pupal case counts were also monitored in several vineyards. A paper on this study was presented at the ASEV Eastern Section meeting in Rochester, NY.

Cooperative work with the University of Arkansas in screening advanced selections from their breeding program continues at three UT Research and Education Centers. The planting at the Middle TN Research and Education Center in Spring Hill (about 50 miles southwest of Nashville) was set in 2002. It contains 13 candidates, five of which are named varieties. This was the third harvest for the trial. Fruit set, although not as heavy as in 2005, still necessitated substantial cluster thinning. Two identical plantings having 16 advanced selections were established in 2003 at the Highland Rim Research and Education Center in Springfield, 30 miles north of Nashville, and the Plateau Research and Educaiton Center in Crossville, 100 miles east of Nashville. Dieback of the vines at the Plateau Center was severe, as was the case in the winter of 2004. Many of the vines had to be cut back to a single bud to find live tissue. Regrowth of these vines over the summer months far exceeded that experienced during the previous year.

Bill Morris

The Wines of The South regional wine competition was held for its fourth year in 2005. A total of 407 wines from wineries in ten states were judged. This represents a 26% increase from the previous year.

The 2006 Wines of the South competition will be held on November 11 at the University

of Tennessee Conference Center.

Tony Johnston

We planted about 200 Cynthiana vines at the Rutherford County Extension Office this spring and have the trellises built now. Most of the vines made it to the wire this year despite our tardiness in getting them pruned and trained. The Master Gardener's club members are enjoying working in the vineyard as part of their training and we plan to offer grape workshops in the near future (especially next fall/winter when we need to prune them).

Grape and Wine Legislative Activities

A lot of activity aimed at changing Tennessee's Grape/Wine Law went on this year with the legislature. Several meetings were held with senators and representatives to explain why a modification of our law was desperately needed. Fortunately for us, the lobbyist for the liquor distributors and representatives for the restaurant association were also in attendance to muddy the water and make sure that no one knew what was going on.

Saint Mary's Health System in Knoxville got very interested in the potential for grapes and wines in some of our East TN counties that are facing hard times with the dramatic reduction in tobacco acreage. With their help, we put together some information projecting the impact that grapes and wines could have on these counties if only a modest acreage was planted. We secured an audience with the governor, who grew up in the Finger Lakes area of New York State and is pro-wine. Several proposals were made to the governor and the Commissioner of Agriculture.

Surprisingly, some changes in the law resulted. Not surprisingly, they were not what we wanted. The current law placed the cap for direct sales to consumers at the winery at 20,000 gallons and for the 1st three years of a winery's existence, at least 50% of the fruit had to come from within the state and, after 3 years, 75% had to come from in-state.

If, for some reason, this fruit was not available, a winery could apply for a waiver that, if granted, would allow for more fruit being brought in than the 25% currently allowed.

This level still remains, however, there is a provision that removes the cap from the winery entirely as long as at least **50% of the grapes** used come from inside the state's boundaries. If, in a given year, at least 50% of the fruit cannot be obtained from in-state sources, the winery has to revert to the previous level (20,000 gallon). Needless to say that such a provision would tend to discourage anyone considering establishment of a big winery, especially in view of the fact that not enough grapes are grown in Tennessee at the present time to satisfy the current needs of wineries.