

GRAPE PRESS

Fall 2015

The Quarterly Newsletter of the VIRGINIA VINEYARDS ASSOCIATION

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INSIDE



Regional Reports

A look at the 2015 harvest around the state.

PAGES 3-6

Save for a Rainy Day

Sage advice from Tony Wolf is worth filing away the next time you're dealing with the prospect of rain at harvest time.

PAGE 7

Post-Harvest

The work's not over yet. Mizuho Nita offers tips to guard against mildew as the weather turns cooler.

PAGE 9

Workshop

New to grapes? Registration is open for the Mid-Atlantic Wine Grape Production Workshop in November.

PAGE 10

Building Know-How

A look at building codes when it comes to farm structures.

PAGE 11



Bill Tonkins

President's Corner

Looking Back at the Season

By Tom Kelly
Kelly Vineyard Services

Here in late September in the Northern Piedmont, harvest is well underway.

Most of the white wine varieties are behind us, and the reds are coming in fast on their heels. The warm daytime temperatures of August and September have boosted sugar levels rapidly, while the cool nights have preserved acid and kept pH levels in check.

The dry conditions of these same months have held down disease pressure compared to the wet early and mid-season.

Yields also seem to be coming in better than expected. I suspect, at least in the case of the vineyards I work with, that this may be due to a rather specific chain of events: rainy conditions during bloom caused spotty berry-set and the clusters at lag phase were looking pretty small. As the rain and heat continued into July and early August, however, bunch closure came almost two weeks early in most varieties.

Vine vigor was high and berry and expansion continued at an accelerated rate. In the case of one vineyard, lag-phase samples showed cluster weights that were on par with historical averages, but by veraison, cluster weights were already above those of the previous year's final harvest weight.

Fortunately, conditions through most of August and September

See PRESIDENT on page 2

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER (cont.)

PRESIDENT from page 1

were unusually dry. While this doesn't seem to have had a negative effect on berry size, vine vigor slowed down greatly. Shoot tips began to terminate at veraison, and the vine shifted its energy to ripening fruit — just the way we like it!

A Little Too Dry?

In fact, in some cases it was a little too dry. I have seen several incidences of heat/drought stress, and one grower needed to turn on the irrigation to several blocks. Others might have used it if only they had had it.

The recent heat and dry conditions also seem to have brought a few cases of late-season mite problems that can be difficult and costly to deal with within 14 days of harvest.

Only time will tell how this year's climatic conditions will affect wine quality. Big, plump berries may not be problematic for white variety wines but are considerably more troublesome for reds.

A Close Encounter

In the vineyards I am working in, wildlife pressure has also been reasonably low. I did however, have one rather remarkable event worth sharing.

While sampling a block of Chambourcin grapes in Hume, I came to the crest of a gradual incline when I noticed an unexpected visitor about 300 feet in front of me.

My first reaction was, "whose dog is that?" — only to realize very quickly that I was looking at a small bear fully involved in eating grapes.

It looked to be fairly young — about a year old — so my second reaction was "oh s**t, where's mama bear?" After having a good look around and convincing myself that mama was nowhere around, I thought to take out my phone and grab some video only to realize that I'd left my phone in my car. (Third reaction... "S**t, S**t, S**t!")

So, being "a bear of very little brain" myself, I resolved to walk back to my car (finishing my sample along the way), grab my phone and get that footage... which I did.

You can see that [video on the VVA page](#) by following the link posted on our website. May it never be said that I won't risk life and limb for the entertainment of our members!

Winter Meeting Plans

Preparations for the upcoming Winter Technical Meeting are now underway and this year's event is shaping up to be another great one. In past meetings, those segments that include insight and experience from our fellow member growers have always been some of the most well received.

We'd like to do that again this year in a

segment loosely titled: Solutions, Successes and Failures: A Growers Panel. In order to do this however, we need your help. Do you have a particular innovation you'd like to share with the audience? Maybe you've observed some interesting or unusual trends in your vineyard or tried a new product or practice that failed miserably. We want to hear it from you!

We would like to assemble a panel of four to five growers like yourself to share your wisdom with us.

If you have experiences you think our members would benefit from and would like to be part of our program, please contact me directly at tom@kellyvineyardservices.com. We will be trying to finalize the details for our program in the next couple of months so if you're interested please let me know as soon as possible.

Other topics of this year's meeting include worker protection standards, vine nutrition, clean plant material, and much more! Our full program will be published soon, but seating for the seminar is limited. As a result, we will no longer be offering registration at the door, so don't miss this opportunity to learn from and commune with your fellow growers. Register early!

Support the VVA Community

In closing, I would like to remind our members of the VVA's need for volunteers for our standing committees. There are opportunities to serve our industry on all of the many VVA committees including Legislative, Sustainability, Research, Education and Communications.

Service on any one of these committees brings an unprecedented opportunity to interact with and learn from the many great and diverse individuals who make up the Virginia wine industry.

My time on the VVA's board of directors has made it possible for me to meet so many wonderful people. My exposure to the knowledge and experience of growers and winemakers from all around the Commonwealth has undoubtedly made me a better grower.

There is a great sense of community among us hardy folk, and there is no better way I can think of to embrace that sense of community than through service in the VVA.

If you have knowledge, experience or skills you would like to apply to improve our great industry, then please consider serving on any of the above-mentioned committees or the association's board of directors. I urge you to reach out to one of our committee chairpersons or a board officer today!

That's all for now — thanks, and have a great harvest!

Tom Kelly

▶ CENTRAL VIRGINIA: “Our Viognier this year is the best ever.”

By Andrew Hodson
Veritas Vineyard & Winery

As Jack Nicholson would say with that lovely grin — “This folks is about as good as it gets.” We have had plentiful sunshine with cool nights and enough rain to keep everything green.

What a crop! More of everything: total tonnage, tons per acre, pounds per linear foot, and pounds per vine, especially in our Viognier.

Our Viognier this year is the best ever in terms of quality and quantity. Instead of 10 bunches per vine we got 30 and cluster weights were 20 percent heavier.

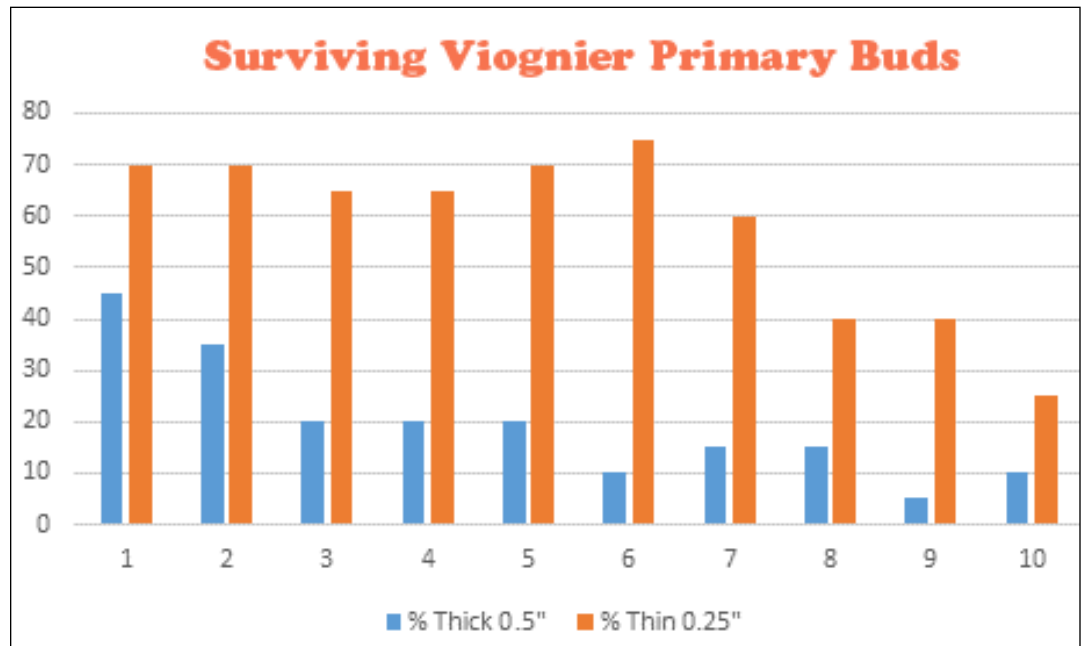
The crazy thing is we were bracing for a third consecutive poor year for Viognier. The winter this year was brutal for us with several days at minus 17 centigrade.

One of the big problems with Viognier of course is Primary Bud Necrosis so we carried out a check of 10 thick canes and 10 thin canes from each of our two Viognier vineyards in December 2014 to see how this may affect our yield in 2015. The first 10 primary buds were checked on a total of 40 canes going from the basal buds out to the end. The results are shown in the chart above.

You will see that a full 60 percent of the primary buds on the thin canes of less than half an inch were found to be healthy but the primary buds on the thicker canes of over half an inch were mostly dead.

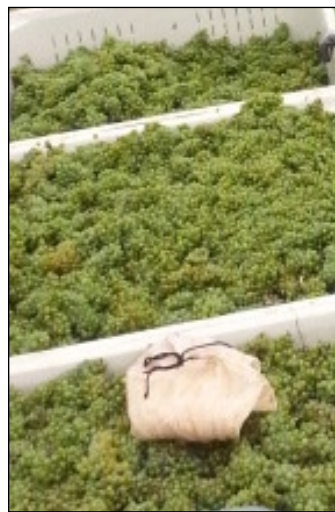
We would not normally select these canes during pruning, but it does confirm that the thinner canes are preferable. We also found that the further from the basal buds you go the more likely you were to find dead buds. Only 25% of the 10th buds were healthy.

On Chris Hill’s advice we counted buds and concluded that



Graph: Courtesy of Andrew Hodson; Photo by Bill Tonkins

In the graph above, Veritas checked the first 10 primary buds on a total of 40 thin and thick canes. Buds on the thin canes had a higher survival rate. At left and on Page 1, Viognier harvest under way at Veritas.



we had lost 80 percent of the crop. We pruned accordingly, leaving as many buds as we possibly could, and — low and behold — come bud break, we had fluorescence like never before.

Was it the result of our pruning? I think not. We all know that Viognier has a tendency to crop in a cyclical fashion especially when the vines are more than seven years old.

Typically, over the past 10

years, we have been seeing an average of 2.32 tons per acre. In 2013-2014, comparing equivalent blocks, we recorded VSP to VSP yields of 1.1 and 0.72 tons/acre respectively.

This year, after the worst winter in 15 years, we recorded a yield of 5.5 tons/acre!

It is Mother Nature doing what she does best, and that is to confound anyone who thinks they know better than her. In our case I am more inclined to think that the bumper crop was related to the meager crop of the last two years. (Note: you may find the original association of bumper with wine interesting — see below.)

Looking at Growing Degree Units we are +73 from normal compared with this time last year when we were negative 204, so compared to last year we are a total of 277 GDUs better off.

That, folks, is PDG — pretty darn good.

We have been pro-active with our fungal sprays and we treated aggressively any suggestion of Spotted Winged Drosophila, so to use the California slang we are hanging good!

So, if you are a Viognier grower, take heart and do what we are doing and make enough Viognier to last for the next two years.

Note: How did bumper become associated with wine?

The original bumper was a large cup, filled to the brim with wine, and used for toasting. Why it is called a bumper is a bit uncertain, but could be from the idea of knocking such glasses together during a toast. From Thomas D’Urfey’s “Madam Fickle of 1676: (Source: Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition).”

► NO. VIRGINIA: “The white varieties overall were large crops with nice ripe flavors.”

By Dean Triplett
Willowcroft Farm Vineyards

Summer 2015 was long and hot. It was fairly wet early on, but we went into a dry spell at the beginning of veraison that lasted through to the end of August. Located as we are in central Loudoun County, most of the summer’s storms missed us and swept up to the northern portion of the county. We had some direct hits, but not many.

Disease pressure has been fairly low since flowering. I had one outbreak in late July of powdery mildew in one of my vineyards, but this was taken care of pretty easily. Some growers I’ve talked to had minor problems with downy mildew, but this, too, was taken care of in short order.

Japanese beetle damage has been a major problem for some growers, yet less so for others. We sprayed twice in two of our six vineyards and once in the others. Yet, other growers I know put on five or more sprays throughout the growing season.

Most vineyards were pretty clean heading into harvest with some botrytis in the whites. We put on 12 sprays this year which is about average for us. Temperatures were solidly in the upper 80’s and mid 90’s throughout the summer. Fortunately we got a break every 10 days or so with a drop in humidity for a couple of days and then back to the heat. Luckily, we never did get any 100-degree days.

By the third week of September here at Willowcroft, we had harvested Muscat Ottonel, Seyval, Albarino, Traminette, Riesling and Chardonnay. The white varieties overall were large crops with nice ripe flavors and fairly high brix readings.

The acidity in most varieties is lower than we would like to see. High pH’s are something we are keeping an eye on as well. Blame the heat for the good and the not so good.

We’ve taken some samples of our reds and we’re seeing brix readings in the upper 20 to 21 degrees range with lower total acidity and higher pH numbers. Merlot will be the first red harvested. So far, this year’s harvest is running about 12 days ahead of last year.

Bird damage has been an issue for us this year. It’s not flocks of birds doing the damage, just individuals coming in and pecking at berries in the clusters that are most open to the sky. Botrytis has formed in some berries, while others just dry up.

Growers who employed netting in their vineyards have seen less of this kind of damage.



Photos by Kelly Peck



This year’s Chardonnay harvest at Willowcroft Farm Vineyards.

saying that her Chardonnay was at 21 degrees brix with a pH reading of 3.2 the first week of September and they anticipated harvest in about two weeks.

Bill Freitag of Toll Gate Farm emailed me the following:

“Summer has been good to us here in Rappahannock County. Fruit is ripening very nicely, with Pinot Gris about ready for a mid-August harvest. Viognier is cropped heavier than I’ve ever seen it and building sugar in good form. Cab Franc is also almost 80 percent turned blue and adding sugar. Petit Verdot is the laggard, but is starting to turn. Oh well, it’s always the last anyway.

“Outside of a vicious Japanese beetle season (sprayed insecticide almost weekly for a month), we have not had any real disease pressure with all the 90-plus degree days we had. Of course, with abundant rain and high temperatures, the entire vineyard piled on a good 12-15 inches of additional shoot growth before finally tapering off by the end of August. We made multiple hedging passes in all varieties, particularly those on Lyre trellis systems, to keep the interiors clean.

“Our program of rebuilding to recover from the cold injury of the previous years is coming along slowly. We continued to aggressively train replacement shoots up on about 50 percent of the mature vines, and we’ll be laying down new cordons this

Critters overall have been less destructive this year. Raccoon damage, while there, is not as bad as in past years. However, we’ve still had to maintain traps in some of our vineyards. Oddly though, one of our vineyards that had a history of critter damage has been blissfully quiet.

Deer pressure has also been lower than past years. A number of locals I’ve talked to are of the opinion that the deer population as a whole is down due to the last two severe winters. If this turns out to be true it wouldn’t break my heart, especially knowing just how fast deer populations can rebound.

Even with the damage we are seeing, however, larger than normal crops are allowing us to fill up tank space with juice. We’ve even sold some fruit because of concerns over lack of tank space.

Theresa Robertson of Two Twisted Posts Winery in northwest Loudoun wrote me

See *NORTHERN VIRGINIA* on page 5

▶ **NO. VIRGINIA**

NORTHERN VIRGINIA from page 4

winter. The new cordons laid down this spring were a bit disappointing, with about a third just not budding out. Haven't figured out what happened.

"Now we're ready for the final lap to get to harvesting. All in all, the season has been typical: Lots of new challenges, lots of old problems and lots of opportunities to exercise our experience and intuition."

The comments Bill made about retraining his winter-damaged vines brings to mind our own attempts at retraining vines. The conversion of my Albarino from VSP to one-legged ballerina seems to have been successful. The crop load appears to be higher than in previous years with crop quality the same or better.

The conversion of my Muscat Ottonel from

high wire to VSP kind of looks crazy, but seems to be on the way to being successful. We didn't get a lot of fruit off of these vines due to the winter damage and retraining but I'm hopeful for future vintages. My experience in retraining vines downward tells me it will take a few years for things to look "normal." Hopefully, I won't keep getting winter damage in these vines in the future.

Nate Walsh of Sunset Hills sent me this email in early September:

"Leading up to ripening we saw a healthy, not overly wet summer with a few instances of small powdery mildew outbreak, Japanese beetle pressure that lasted from late June to early August, and a few worrisome strings of overcast, drizzly days that led to bunch rots here and there.

"Veraison came a few days early for us, and due to the very hot and very dry August, at the time of writing we are at an average of about 10 days ahead of our average picking schedule for most varieties. Berries are smaller than usual but we are still seeing

berry swell."

Mark Malick sent me the following update on his efforts to minimize winter damage in his vineyards:

"In November/December 2014, Maggie Malick Wine Caves hilled up eight acres of first-year vines in anticipation of a colder than normal winter. Our location is four miles south of Maryland, so we are one of the most northern wineries in Virginia. The lowest temperature recorded was only zero degrees Fahrenheit.

"This was the first time we ever tried hilling up over the winter. Another winery in Loudoun County lost over half of its new vines the previous year due to extreme cold, so we experimented. The results were conclusive. We lost less than 1% of the new vines.

"If I had to weigh the cost vs. benefit, I would say it was worth it. If you lose a new vine over the winter, you really don't know

See NORTHERN VIRGINIA on page 6

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► **SO. VIRGINIA:** “Some vineyard owners ... had difficulty selling their crop.”

By Paul Anctil
Sans Soucy Vineyards

I think the general consensus of our regional growers is that the 2015 harvest is a good one, maybe too good in terms of tonnage.

With a few exceptions, most of the vineyards reported having enough rain when needed. A few times it got close to being too dry, but for the most part the growing season finished well. It has only been in the last few days of late September that the heavy fall rains are threatening the late-ripening varieties.

The most-talked about topic was the recent effort by some to push for Virginia grants and subsidies to encourage new vineyard development.

More than one regional grower is questioning the proposal being put forward by the Virginia Department of Agriculture, the Virginia Farm Bureau, and others.

Some vineyard owners told me that they had difficulty selling their crop. Their harvest was sufficiently robust that they had more fruit than their selling agreements required, and had difficulty scrambling to find a home for the balance of their crop.

At least one vineyard had an acre of Vidal that they couldn't sell or give away.

My own harvest here at Sans Soucy pushed the limits of my tank space and I could have easily sold a ton or two of this year's harvest. We don't always have a bumper-crop year but this region generally has good numbers. We can't be the only region experiencing this.

► **NO. VIRGINIA**

NORTHERN VIRGINIA from page 5

that until April's budbreak, so the chance of replacing it with an exact replacement that season is slim.

“So then, you really lose four things: two years of not having a vine in the ground at that point; the labor already paid to plant it; the cost of a new vine; and the cost to plant the second vine.

“This coming winter we may experiment with hilling up our established cold-sensitive varieties, including Garnacha, Mouvedre, Syrah, Tannat, and maybe Merlot.”

As always I want to thank everyone who takes time to send me their comments and observations, especially during harvest. Hopefully, all of us will get a great vintage in tanks and barrels.

So, the discussion generally leads to asking the big WHY?

Most of the growers in this area took the huge risk of establishing vineyards when there was NO support for growers. Even the academic research was limited for growing grapes in the southern region.

Fifteen years ago most of the information available to us was adapted from research conducted in the northern part of Virginia. There is nothing unusual about that; it was fully justified and expected by the natural growth of the grape industry in Virginia. But, times have changed.

Forgive me and some of my local colleagues for being a bit suspicious of the motivation behind this initiative. It seems that the narrative is being formulated by those wineries that have the ear of power brokers. The general conclusion is not that there is a shortage of grapes in Virginia, but a shortage of grapes priced at a level that benefits the largest wine producers.

As we all know, it takes several years to

reach the break-even-point, let alone a profit level. Like it or not, our climate requires extensive and expensive viticultural practices. The available labor pool for vineyard work is shrinking and getting more costly and less motivated. (You can blame that on other government programs that encourage indifference to work.)

Now comes a proposal to underwrite the cost of new production that can only squeeze an already narrow profit margin. Would that encourage current growers to stop? Would others conclude that they, too, would have to evolve into wine production to benefit from the added value of finished wine?

Seems like we get back to that curious creature of unintended consequences and we end up with fewer grapes at even higher prices. If wineries want to boast that they are Virginia grown, then pay for the fruit.

If they want the right to buy less expensive non-Virginia fruit, then pay for appropriate licenses that allows that. The buying public will then choose accordingly.

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How to Assess When Rain Threatens

Editor's note: *Grape Press* usually has a significant amount of time between when articles are submitted and when we publish, so late-breaking weather patterns are rarely reflected. That was especially true with this issue. Most of the regional reports focused on the hot, dry summer and the beginning of the harvest. That was even true of articles submitted in late September. And then the rain started.

Vineyard after vineyard scrambled to get grapes off the vine while they were still dry,, and some experimented with ways of picking in the rain and then drying them. Hopefully, we can tell some of those stories in the next issue of Grape Press.

But for those who wondered whether they should pick or wait out the rain, Virginia Tech's Tony Wolf offered succinct and thoughtful advice in a special edition of Viticulture Notes, published on Sept. 30 as Virginia growers braced for five days of rain. Here's an excerpt to file away for next time:

By Tony Wolf

Viticulture Extension Specialist, AHS Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Tropical temperatures in the seventies and persistent wetting of fruit over such an extended period of time ultimately lead to fruit splitting, botrytis and other rots. The grower is forced to (a) pick early to avoid the destruction; (b) pick in the rain; or (c) wait and hope that some portion of the crop is salvageable after the rains.

In my experience, grapes that are at or above 22 Brix do not tolerate five days of rain; it becomes a matter of necessity to get them off the vine.

Factors to consider are how sound the fruit currently is and what is the local area forecast. If the remaining fruit is starting to split and/or rot, and there is a break in the weather, I'd be inclined to bring it in.

Parts of central and southwestern Virginia may see more than 12 inches of rain before the coming weekend is over. Northern Virginia, where there is still a lot of hanging crop, may see less than 5 inches.

How Joachin tracks is still very uncertain, but it is fairly certain that all of Virginia and much of the mid-Atlantic will receive significant rainfall in addition to what has already fallen (3 inches in the Winchester area yesterday alone).

Botrytis was a significant problem with our Cabernet Sauvignon in the disastrous 2011 season and I put on an application of fenhexamid (Elevate™) fungicide (0-day PHI)

during a break in our weather on Monday. I considered adding a neonicotinoid insecticide for fruit flies, but ultimately didn't, principally because we have not found them in our grapes thus far — although our entomologist has been routinely finding both spotted wing (*Drosophila suzukii*) and "regular" (*D. melanogaster*) fruit flies at our vineyard since early August.

That said, I have heard reports of SWD being found in "tight-clustered" varieties such as Petit Verdot where some physical damage to the grapes might already have occurred.

I don't have a tremendous amount of faith that any spray application is going to protect us against the potential damage caused by five or more days of rainy weather, but our fruit (Petit Manseng and Cab Sauvignon) is in good condition and I felt that the botrytis-specific spray might help the remaining crop "weather" the storms.

Of course, the weather forecast Monday was

a little brighter than today's latest forecast. As an aside, we were able to harvest some of our Cabernet grown in root-restrictive bags last Thursday.

The root-restricted vines are often advanced in grape maturity compared to non-root-restricted vines and the 5 to 7-day advanced development sometimes means the difference in getting the crop off before a significant rain event.

We will take our chances with the weather but I'm certain that there will be much sorting required when we finally do pick sometime after the weekend.

Good luck to those of you that, like us, still have some fruit hanging on the vines.

Great advice! If you're a grower, and you don't subscribe to Viticulture Notes, you're missing a lot. To get on the list, send an email to Tony at vitis@vt.edu and ask to be added to his Viticulture Notes.

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When Spreading Goes Wrong

‘It was as if I had taken a shotgun to my vines’

By **Bill Tonkins**
Veritas Vineyard & Winery

Earlier this year, I attended the excellent training session, “Advanced Nutritional Workshops” that was conducted by Virginia Tech, and I came away determined to resolve any deficiencies in our vineyards.

I carried out the recommended soil and petiole sampling at full bloom as instructed and studied the results with great care.

Fortunately, there were only two areas that were recommended for soil fertilizer amendments. They were my very own acre of Petite Verdot and an acre of Sauvignon Blanc, both of which are planted on steep, terraced slopes where much of the top soil was removed or displaced by earthworks.

It was recommended that we put down 1 ton per acre of Dolomitic Lime and other micronutrients. Typically, I would spread the micronutrients in the row by hand on such a small lot but in view of the fact that I had a ton of lime, which would be pelletized to go down, it was suggested that I should simply broadcast it, so I did.

I borrowed a spreader that I could tow behind my ATV. The arms that throw out the fertilizer are driven by the wheels. Harmless, you might think!

Well, it was as if I had taken a shotgun to my vines, which was probably not helped by the fact that the vineyard is terraced and the fruit zone below is in the firing line (as you can see in the photos from the scatter in the leaves and even worse in the fruit zone).

Fortunately, I spread the fertilizer before veraison and I am pleased to say that the berries just died and shriveled up without the spread of any rot. The Sauvignon Blanc is safely in and the Petit Verdot is still just hanging there. Time will tell if the fruit thinning has any impact on quality. In the meantime, a word to the wise: I do not recommend that you try this in the growing season.



Photos by Bill Tonkins

Attempts at distributing lime with a spreader that threw the pellets at the vines turned out not to be a good idea, causing damage to both the leaves and the fruit.

Mildew: No Rest for the Weary

By Mizuho Nita
Grape pathologist, Virginia Tech

Expect that most crops will be harvested by the time this issue of Grape Press rolls out, and that we will be ready to wrap up the season.

Often what we recommend at the end of the season is to take steps to clean up downy mildew and powdery mildew from your vines.

We tend to apply fewer (or less effective) fungicides toward the end of the season, because of concerns about the potential effect on wine making.

At the same time, temperatures drop, especially during the night, and that creates conditions that favor development of downy mildew.

If we do not take action against downy mildew, severely infected vines can be defoliated from the resulting infection.

Putting the Next Season at Risk

Even if the disease level is not high enough to cause defoliation, the presence of many infected leaves will lead to a higher risk of downy mildew for the following season because these infections will result in production of over-wintering spores of downy mildew.

Powdery mildew will produce an over-wintering structure called chasmothecium

that contains spores that will be ready to be airborne when rainwater hits in the following spring.

You may be able to see them with the naked eye. If you take a close look at a colony of powdery mildew on a leaf at the end of the season, you may see small black dots, maybe the size of black pepper powders. These chasmothecia have hooked appendages that help chasmothecia attach to various parts of grapevines.

Over-wintering of Mildew

One of the frequently asked questions during the winter is about whether an application of fungicide during the fall and or winter will reduce the risk of downy or powdery mildew.

Unfortunately, previous studies indicated that actions during the fall and winter to target the over-wintering stage of these pathogens have very low impacts on the next season's downy or powdery mildew.

It is partly due to the rate of their spore production. Even if we are successful with the reduction of over-wintering structures, we will be less likely to kill all the spores because they might be hidden under the bark or soil.

Come springtime, the survivors can then produce a large number of spores within a few generations.

Thus, ideally, we should keep our vines

clean as much as possible until they drop leaves naturally. Moreover, vines need as many actively photosynthesizing leaves as possible in order to store carbohydrate into their trunks, so that they can increase the chance of survival over the winter.

Since these applications will be made after harvest, you can use a combination of mancozeb and sulfur, or fixed copper by itself (especially if your vines are clean) to keep vines clean without spending a lot of money.

Assess Vine Health

The other item I would encourage you to think about at this time of the season is assessment of overall health of your vines. Since there will still be foliage on the vine, you should be able to determine whether each vine has good healthy leaves, clusters, cordons, trunks, etc.

You may find some trends among healthy and struggling vines within your vineyard that can be attributed to the environment such as availability of nutrients and water, which you may be able to address the following season.

Or in the case of struggling vines with no obvious or easy solutions (e.g., vine with crown galls), you can tag them to watch closely for one more year; or retrain the cordons or trunks; or replace them the following spring.

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Register for Winter Tech Now!

Registration for the Winter Technical meeting, which runs Jan. 28-30, will begin in late fall. Watch the VVA website and your inbox for notifications. Don't delay — last year, this event sold out and we were unable to accommodate on-site registrations.

If you do not currently receive VVA emails and would like to start, contact Tracy at info@virginiavineyardsassociation.com or 571-236-8074.

VVA News in Brief

Volunteers Needed for Wine Board Review Committee

The Virginia Wine Board is composed of winery and vineyard representatives appointed by the governor to aid in the growth, leadership and representation of the Virginia wine industry. The Wine Board is given the task of soliciting and funding research and education projects that further the wine industry.

To better evaluate the diverse projects submitted, the Wine Board formed a review committee to utilize expertise in the industry.

Currently, the review committee is composed of growers and winemakers. The review committee is now seeking additional members to help in the process.

The review committee is chaired by Emily Pelton of Veritas Vineyard & Winery. The committee holds a one-day meeting in Charlottesville in late February to evaluate

the projects. Participation on the committee is open to all Virginia wine industry personnel.

Please contact Emily at: Emily@veritaswines.com to submit your name and credentials. Emily will be glad to answer any questions you may have. Please consider sharing your skills by serving on the review committee to move the Virginia wine industry forward!

There's Still Time to Book Your VVA South American Tour

The VVA is sponsoring a nine-day trip to Chile and Argentina, beginning Feb. 20, 2016, and running through Feb. 28. The trip, which follows the VVA's first such trip to Bordeaux two years ago, will seek out advanced viticulture and winemaking operations in those two rapidly developing countries.

Some of the industry players the association will visit are household names, while others

are nearly unknown. Please read the VVA Chile Argentina brochure on the VVA website for additional information.

In addition to discussions on soils, climate, techniques (viticulture and winemaking), and research projects, we will discuss industry development and business issues.

We are also arranging friendly blind tastings of Virginia wines versus their South American counterparts. There will be some free time for sightseeing as well.

The minimum number of travelers have been enrolled, but — as of this writing — there are still three extra spots available. All details are in the on-line brochure, except that since the date for a deposit has come and gone, you will need to send in \$1,000 to our office manager's address at vavineyardsassoc@gmail.com to reserve one of these late spots. The spots will be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Introduction to Mid-Atlantic Wine Grape Production Workshop

8:30 a.m., Nov. 11, 2015, at Virginia Tech's AHS Jr. AREC, Winchester, Va. (Frederick County)

What: Team-taught program designed for those either exploring or recently engaged in wine grape production. There will be a classroom and field component of the workshop. Prepare to go outside, rain or shine. Special post-workshop social hosted by the Bogaty Family Wine Group at James Charles Vineyard and Winery. Please plan to arrive before 8:15 a.m.

Who: Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Farm Credit, County Department of Economic Development and winery professionals will teach the workshop. <http://www.arec.vaes.vt.edu/alson-h-smith/index.html> (directions to the AREC from I-81 can also be found here).

REGISTRATION REQUIRED: \$50/person. Includes lunch. Pre-registration must be received by Nov. 5.

Please fill out the form below, print and include a check for \$50 per registrant, payable to: Virginia Tech Foundation.

Mail to: Grape Workshop, Virginia Tech, 595 Laurel Grove Rd., Winchester VA 22602

Number attending: _____ X \$50 = \$ _____

Name(s): _____

Mailing address: _____

Email address: _____ Phone Number: _____

Please indicate any food allergies: _____

Please direct questions to Tremain Hatch, thatch@vt.edu, (540) 869-2560 ext. 11. If you have a disability and need any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Tremain Hatch, AHS Jr. AREC at (540) 869-2560 ex. 11* during business hours of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. *TDD number is (800) 828-1120.

Building Code Blues: Know the Law

By **Bill Robson**
16 Rows Vineyard

On occasion, vineyard owners and wineries find themselves at an impasse with the local building official in determining how the state code applies to building in a farm/agricultural environment.

Recently, a vineyard owner complained to me that the local building official forced her to get a building permit to construct her tasting room and vineyard office. The official insisted that she apply for and be granted a building permit. She did as she was told. Unfortunately, the building official was incorrect!

The construction regulations for the Commonwealth of Virginia are established at the state level through the legislative action of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. This state level agency adopts and amends the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC). "Enforcement of the USBC is the responsibility of the local government's building inspections department" (see <http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/index.php/va-building-codes/building-and-fire-codes/regulations/uniform-statewide-building-code-usbc.html>).

The term "enforcement" does not mean recreating, defining, or unreasonable interpretation. Clearly, in this situation, the local jurisdiction stepped outside the confines established by the state. As a state law, the building code establishes the standards by which a local government must operate and enforce the building code. It does not allow a local official or department to make up

its own rules, codes or deviate from clearly established requirements.

In this case, the building official ignored a clear exception in the statewide building code. Article 100.3 of the Virginia Construction code (2012) allows for exemptions from complying with the state building code and applying for a building permit.

Exemption number 6 clearly states that farm buildings and structures are exempt from the code. Under Chapter 2 of the USBC, farm buildings are defined and include "production, display, sampling or sale of agricultural, horticultural ... products produced on the farm." Furthermore, "business or office uses related to the farm operations" and "storage or use of supplies," used on the farm are part of the Farm Building definition and therefore exempt from the building code. (Note: a residence or building used for a residential purpose on a farm is not exempt.)

If you find yourself in this situation with your local building department, follow the steps below, prior to starting construction:

- Write a letter of introduction to the local building department or official identifying the property and your intended use for the farm building. Reference the USBC and the "Farm Building" definition. Ask for a reply in writing to confirm your understanding that the farm building is exempt from the building code.

- The building official is required to issue a response, interpretation or clarification. That response should either confirm, clarify or reject your understanding. If your request is rejected, the letter will also require you to submit a building permit application with the necessary plans.

- Provided that your building complies

with the farm building definition and the building official is requiring a building permit application, your recourse is to file for a building code appeal. If that appeal is denied, then the next step will be to appeal to the state building code appeals board. Assuming you are complying with the farm building definition, the state board will affirm your position and reverse the local official's interpretation/decision.

There has been some debate whether a tasting room is an exempt use in a farm application. A tasting room does qualify as an "exempt use" under the definition of a Farm Structure (reference item 1 under Farm Structure definition).

As radio commentator Paul Harvey often said, "Now for the rest of the story." Even though a tasting room or vineyard office are clearly a part of a farm structure and therefore exempt from the code, a vineyard owner needs to seriously consider the consequences of having the public in a building that has not been appropriately designed.

Architects and engineers rely on the statewide building code to establish design criteria and performance standards. Furthermore, a licensed architect's first obligation is "public safety." There are few architects who would suggest that a public place should not be designed to meet the building code. To do so would violate a reasonable standard of care for the design professional. If the building subsequently collapsed or somehow failed and it could be proven that the design professional did not meet the standard of care (designing in accordance with the building code), he or she would be liable. You as the building owner may also be liable for creating an unsafe condition.

Even though farm structures are exempt from the building code, most jurisdictions will allow the building owner to have the local building department inspect the structure while under construction. This is a worthwhile effort to allay issues of liability and ensure the building is structurally sound. You should also be aware that third-party consultants can inspect the building during construction as a matter of risk prevention.

In summary, although it can be clearly established that farm buildings are exempt from meeting the USBC, it is not advisable to ignore the code requirements for buildings intended for the public's use.

More information on this topic can be obtained from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, or feel free to contact me through the VVA.

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Sustainability Corner

Be Part of the Sustainable Movement

By **Bill Freitag**

Toll Gate Farm and Vineyards

We have now completed the fourth year using our association's online self-assessment tool that codifies science-based best management practices for sustainable viticulture. It is designed to help vineyard managers and owners assess how well they're doing against 119 best management practices spread across 13 major activities. We've named this tool the Virginia Sustainable Winegrowers Self-Assessment Guide (VSWAG).

To get more information and background about the tool, visit the VVA website to see the tool under the Sustainability Tab (<http://vswag.virginiavineyardsassociation.com/login>). The tool is largely intuitive to use and there are numerous aids to assist you, if needed, under the tool's Help tab.

Some VSWAG Statistics as of 2015

We currently have 97 registered Virginia users. Additionally, we also have eight out-of-state users (with .edu domain names) and a small group of miscellaneous users registered in the tool, but they are not included in our statistics. One sad statistic is that we have only six of our Virginia users who completed their entire guide for 2015.

The VSWAG is not a static entity. The workbook was designed to be used on a continuing yearly basis, not as a onetime shot. As you modify your practices to align with the VSWAG, you should update your workbook score.

Additionally, we reset the tool to capture the data for each year at the end of the calendar year. That requires that each user revalidate or change some of the scoring.

To update your scores, you simply click on the score you want. You can select your existing score from last year or a new one if you have made changes to your operation. You do not need to first select the edit icon. I'd like to encourage all 91 of you who have partial workbooks to complete the entire self-evaluation as the 2015 season winds down.

We made some structural changes to the organization of the workbook at the end of the 2014 season, specifically in the number of topics and subtopics. We changed the number of topics from 12 to 13 and more significantly the number of practices from

109 to 119. The modification was done to provide more focus on the individual practices instead of just topics. Further, some of the practices now have sub-practices under their "Learn More" tag.

We also plan to add some more BMPs to the workbook over the coming months to be ready for the 2016 growing season. All this should point out that a onetime pass through the guide is not in a user's best interest. There will always be new and more informative changes.

The More Distant Future

We continued work on the study to define the content and specifications for a Vine Growth Stage Tool in response to the VVA Strategic Plan tasking. The tool will provide the grower with tips for performing key viticultural best practices based on grapevine phenology (annual growth stages of wine grapes) and will be accessible via smart phone, tablet or desk top.

The intent is to provide the information spanning a range of topics from the existing VSWAG's content such as soil management, fertilization, canopy management, and pest management integrated with real-time inputs such as weather data, in one place in an easily accessible form for each stage of growth.

Join the Committee

None of these plans will materialize out of thin air. They will require participation by

members of the association and particularly from the Sustainability Committee.

I hope all our Grape Press readers understand that the VVA is truly a major organization supporting the Virginia wine industry that depends on volunteers to move us into the future. An active group of members defined the basics for the VSWAG. Now it is time for a new generation to step up and move it to the next level.

We need a few good men and women to help in the various committee tasks, particularly defining updates to the VSWAG functionality and defining the Vine Growth Stage Tool. We don't need software developers, but rather practitioners of growing great wine grapes with ideas on how best to select and pass knowledge on to all our members.

Critical to success in this endeavor is willingness to provide some of your valuable time to make this work. The operative word is "work" in this case. It won't be overwhelming but it will require some dedicated time to do properly. If you have an interest in joining us, please contact me at the following address: bfreitag6@gmail.com or call me at 540-675-2509. Let's discuss how we can move forward.

For those of you who created score sheets in past years, you will find your old workbooks on the tool with scores as you left them. Let's get them updated and completed as you work in 2015. Don't forget to print out your Completion Certificate.

Vineyard, Tasting Room Lease Opportunity

New tasting room (nearing completion, compact with two levels for tasting, 650 sf for conditioned storage/processing and a future attached covered deck/pavilion) with 2 acres planting and 6 additional acres planned for planting in 2016 is available for long-term lease. Long-range plans also include a pond and additional 2 acres of vines. Building is oriented north/south providing great views across of the vineyards to the west for spectacular sunsets. Roof slopes south for future solar panel installation. The vineyard is located outside the town of Orange, Virginia, near the airport and several other vineyards. Call Bill for details (703-344-1450).