

# GRAPE PRESS

Fall 2013

The Quarterly Newsletter of the VIRGINIA VINEYARDS ASSOCIATION

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOB CLAYMIER

Desert Rose winery blazes a new path with Crimson Cabernet, above and below.

## Crimson Cab shows promise in Virginia

By Bob Claymier

Desert Rose Ranch & Winery

Growing Crimson Cabernet has been an “interesting” experience for me, and has been a trial and error process (often error) as it is such a new and unknown grape. I picked it initially as I was looking for a big bold red that would do well with the challenges of Virginia, and admittedly, for one that might get my small operation some attention. Plus I like to roll the dice at times!

I came across the following site — <http://davisvines.com/> — run

by Lucian Dressler, a Missouri native who is credited with starting the first AVA in America. He has produced several pollinated crosses with the Norton grape, but to date he seems to have been most successful with Crimson Cabernet, whose parents are Norton and Cabernet Sauvignon. This parentage makes the new grape, which is now an accredited grape variety, 75 percent Cab Sav, since Norton has been DNA tested to be 50 percent Cab Sav.

Lucian likes to say that he has

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President's Corner

## Growers combat critters

By Tom Kelly

Rappahannock Cellars

Is it here yet? We here in Rappahannock County are still anxiously waiting for the 2013 harvest season to begin. As of the writing of this column, I have heard of only the earliest varieties such as Seyval Blanc and Pinot Grigio being brought in. Later ripening white varieties like Chardonnay and Viognier continue to hang in the vineyard while sugars only creep upwards in the cooler, though thankfully dry weather we had over the past several weeks.

Winemakers may enjoy the cool nights and slow ripening for acid retention and flavor development but unfortunately, so do some of our more indigenous grape connoisseurs. Wildlife injury to grape crops has come fast and furious this season.

Birds moved into the vineyard earlier than I can ever remember, attacking red varieties even just at the onset of veraison. One could

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It may not be as exciting as a new varietal, but we're trying out a new format for Grape Press. With sections and labels designed to make it easier for you to navigate, the newsletter will still have the same great content from our members.

Bob & Chris Garsson,  
Communications Committee

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Christine Vrooman, Bruce Zoecklein



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER (cont.)

*Continued from page 1*

observe birds scattering out of the rows just as crews scurried to hang netting over the vines! But avian attackers were just the beginning. One of my neighbor growers captured eight raccoons in only a few nights before he was forced to harvest his Cab Franc at only 19 brix. "Pick it or lose it" was the only advice I could offer him.

I heard from another fellow in Loudoun County whose raccoon tally thus far was 24 and counting! As for myself, I have been chasing from our vines not only birds but raccoon and, most dramatically, bear. This particular creature(s) ripped down bird netting and gorged itself on an estimated two tons of Viognier before it could be stopped.

Other growers may be experiencing damage from other creatures such as squirrels, groundhogs, fox and turkey.

### **The impact of turkeys**

This past year, Dick Thomas, on behalf of the VVA, participated on an advisory panel for the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to develop a new management plan for wild turkey. Unfortunately, pleas from Dick and other farmers to implement kill permits for wild turkeys fell on deaf ears at the department on the grounds that in many grape growing regions insufficient population levels exist to support kill permit hunting.

The department also holds that there is a lack of conclusive evidence that turkeys have a significant negative economic impact on agricultural crops, grapes in particular. In fact, one study cited by those in opposition to allowing kill permits for turkey stated that while turkeys may be present in vineyards, damage to crops is more likely the result of other small animals (such as raccoon) and that turkeys are more likely feeding on insects and other non-crop forage.

In response to this disappointing outcome, the VVA will be working with VT to develop an independent study of the economic impact of wild turkey and other small animals feeding on grape crops. This study is currently only in the conceptual phase of development but plans are being finalized to host two meetings, one in Charlottesville and one in Winchester, to solicit grower input for the development of the parameters of the study and associated grant proposal. Dates, times and locations of the meetings will be announced when the plans are finalized.

The timing of this study coincides well with the VVA's efforts to expand Virginia vineyard acreage and improve vineyard economics. This study will be of particular importance in determining which vertebrate pests are causing substantial economic damage to vineyards so, needless to say, I encourage your involvement.

But, what of non-vertebrate pests? The

Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) and its relative, the Brazilian Fruit Fly (BFF), have become the subject of much consternation among Virginia small fruit growers. I and many other grape growers can count ourselves in their ranks.

### **Controlling the SWD**

SWD is a particularly difficult pest to control due to its short life cycle and the fact that the adults damage the fruit by laying eggs, not feeding so many common insecticides that depend on ingestion of the material by the target pest are ineffective. Some insecticides that kill pests on contact are effective on adults in flight but are not effective on larvae hiding inside the berry and can be devastating to non-target, predatory and pollinating insects.

There is still much to learn about SWD but it would seem to this grower that control strategies should focus on either deterring infestation or breaking the short life cycle of the pest, or (most likely) both.

Along those lines, Christine Vrooman at Ankida Ridge Vineyards has started a message board for growers to share information, experience and ideas regarding SWD and BFF at <http://swd.freeforums.net/thread/2/swd-forum>. If you are currently experiencing difficulties with either of these pests or have some experience you would like to share, I encourage you to log in and join the conversation.

### **Need to expand acreage**

Despite the challenges listed above, there is still (and even more so) a need to expand vineyard acreage in Virginia. On that front, the VVA board, led by Vice President Jim Benefiel and Legislative Chairperson Bill Robson, have been working hard on a proposal to garner state support for vineyard expansion. This plan is still in its infancy and many details have yet to be flushed out but we now have something we can take to state officials for feedback.

That said, we feel strongly optimistic about this new proposal and hope to have exciting news to share with you in the near future!

Anyone who has spent any time growing wine grapes in Virginia knows there have been many great vintages but few easy ones and 2013 has been no exception. Frost, hail, heavy rainfall and wildlife are but a few of the challenges we have had to face this season. Those growers who were the most diligent have had the greatest chance at making 2013 a success.

But with all that hard work and sacrifice comes great reward in knowing that somewhere, someone is breaking bread with friend or family and enjoying a great bottle of wine that they helped put on their table. This is the spirit that drives great winegrowers. I've had the honor of working with many such growers this season and from what I have seen, 2013 is shaping up to be another great vintage!



► **EASTERN:** "Most growers report having an abundant quantity of fruit."

By Pete Johns  
New Kent Winery

As growers of grapes, we all know that the ripening of our fruit requires a certain number of sunlight hours. Here in the Eastern Region of Virginia we have had an abundance of rain and so many days of overcast skies throughout the summer that our grape ripening has been prolonged to as much as three weeks longer than normal. We just haven't had the hours of daylight that we need.

The Eastern Shore growers have not had as much of a problem as other growers in the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula and central Virginia.

In normal conditions, our growers would begin picking Chardonnay grapes in mid to late August. This year we are just beginning to pick our Chardonnay at the end of the first week in September. The rains have also created a

great deal of disease pressure for our growers. Downy and Powdery Mildew have caused most of the problems. Almost every vineyard in our region has faced much higher disease pressures this year than in a "normal year".

This higher disease pressure has made for a very expensive year for growing grapes, with most vineyards applying five or more additional fungicide sprays in an effort to help curb mildew pressures. Instead of a 12 to 14 day spray schedule most growers sprayed every 6 to 8 days.

As far as the crop is concerned in our region, most growers report having an abundant quantity of fruit and we are all hopeful that the quality will be to our expectations. For some reason many growers seem to have higher pH and TA levels than normal, probably a result of prolonged wet weather conditions through the summer.

As the harvest continues we are now experiencing more typical fall weather with

bright sunny days and cooler nights. These conditions are ideal for the ripening of our red grapes and we are hopeful these conditions will provide us with deep color and ideal tannins in our fruit.

The new growers in the region are certainly scratching their heads and wondering what is normal. The good news for these growers is they had little need for irrigation systems this year.

At this writing we are at 125 percent of our normal rainfall. That's a lot of rain and the year is far from over.

First year plantings have done well with strong trunks, deep roots and adequate leaf development to assure the vines are prepared to face the winter months.

The old timers sitting around the pickle barrel say that nature has a way of balancing things out.

If this is true, what might we expect for the upcoming winter months?

► **CENTRAL:** "The outpouring of wildlife ... has reached biblical proportions." — Chris Hill

From vineyard reports

It's been a tough year in the vineyard for everyone in Virginia, and the central region experienced much the same conditions – and problems – as the rest of the Commonwealth. It started with a late frost, followed by rain – and rain, and rain and more rain – and continued with the pests. And don't even start on Spotted Wing Drosophila.

The pests included birds, squirrels, raccoons, and the like. No lions or tigers, but definitely some bears, according to Chris Hill.

"The outpouring of wildlife in the vineyard this year has reached biblical proportions," Chris said. "Birds (Robins and Starlings), raccoons, possums and deer have been incredible, but the squirrel and the bear have been the biggest surprises of the year. Who would have guessed that squirrels could eat TONS of fruit? And who could guess that the black bear existed in such numbers?"

Chris said that he isn't sure what to do about the bears – and he said he's talking about lots of bears. But he added that the vineyards located near woods have taken a severe beating, and said "this year will definitely affect my thoughts on site location."

**Pest pressure**

Everyone I've spoken to or heard from has cited problems with pests. "Pest pressure has been off the charts this year," said Emily Pelton

of Veritas Vineyard and Winery. In theory, she said, this is due to low levels of acorns and black berries. Whatever the case, in her neck of the woods, "it is truly astonishing how much fruit was lost, even with netting and dogs in the vineyards."

Maybe we were lucky to have some fruit left to feed the various pests, given that we started off the season with a late frost. Jeff Sanders of Glass House Winery noted that his vineyard had deep frosts on the grass, but not in the canopy.

"This was a year I am glad my fruiting wire was 30 inches off the ground," he said. That helped him dodge frost damage. Still, with cooler weather, bud break was two weeks late or more, compared to the past six years.

**Ripening patterns**

Jeff noted a strange pattern in ripening this year. "Some varieties, such as Pinot Gris, were two to three weeks behind normal. But others, including our Barbera, seemed to be right on schedule. Barbera finished veraison at the same time Pinot Gris did, when it is usually three weeks later. Likewise, our Viognier seems less far behind than the Pinot Gris."

The growing season was further complicated by the rain, which Emily described as "quite frankly, too depressing to catalogue."

The rain, and the humid wet nets, brought a higher-than-normal incidence of disease, and heroic efforts to control it.

"There was tremendous downy mildew

pressure with the intense, continuous, summer rainfall," said Chris. "After the seasonal use of Mancozeb products, it was very good to have the newer, systemic, downy fungicides. In big rain years, Captan, Propylate and the like by themselves don't seem to be enough, especially when the first cool nights in August arrive."

**A great September**

Chris noted that those vineyards with good foliage were able to capitalize on the beautiful weather of September, which he described as "gorgeous." The earliest varieties harvested weren't able to take advantage of that beautiful weather, but the later varieties were beginning to look fairly spectacular, as Grape Press neared press time.

"The Petit Verdot could be tremendous," Chris said, adding: "Time will tell."

Past VVA president Bill Tonkins of Veritas said the biggest challenge for him has been canopy management. "The vines have been growing like 'triffids,' which, for those of you who were not born in the 1950s or who are not Sci-Fi film fans, are plants that spell the end of humanity. You can meet them today with online gaming at 'Cletus's Farm' where they are weeds designed to stop you from harvesting your crop."

Bill said his crew has been hedging 8 hours a day because of the early rain this year. "No sooner did we get to the end of the vineyards

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► **NO. VIRGINIA:** "It seems like all of nature wants to get in on the grape-eating act."

By Dean Triplett  
Willowcroft Farm Vineyards

The beginning of summer 2013 was cooler, cloudier, and had more rain than normal. We went through a warm spell in July, but experienced very few days above 90 degrees throughout August. This summer was certainly nothing like last year's 100-plus degrees for days on end. September has been a repeat of August so far as temperatures are concerned.

Because of the cooler, damper conditions we experienced early on, Downey Mildew was a major concern for all growers in my region. Many vineyards that suffered through May's frost were hit very hard with Downey Mildew, particularly if the owners didn't keep up a very good spray program.

At least one vineyard I've seen has a particularly resistant strain of DM. Even after following a pretty tight spray program, the operator of this vineyard has had significant problems trying to control this disease.

Besides Downey Mildew problems, Japanese Beetles returned to vineyards in Northern Virginia this season. Nearly everyone I've talked to has had to spray for the little buggers. We were lucky and had to

spray only once. Others I've talked to have applied upwards of three sprays.

**Insect flair-ups**

As a possible result of spraying for Japanese Beetles, we've had a European Red Mite flair-up in some of our vineyards. At least one other grower I know had a similar problem. Cicadas have also been a problem for at least some growers. They have not been anywhere near as widespread as Japanese beetles, and we haven't had much of an issue with them in our immediate area. Spotted Wing Drosophila is starting to be seen in some vineyards west of us and is a serious concern.

Fruit set seems to be moderate to good for most growers and most varieties. However, some folks have reported lower fruit set in some varieties. Viognier seems to be particularly hard hit. The reduction of fruit available due to the frost of May 14th, along with some lower crop estimates, has greatly increased the demand for all vinifera grapes.

Actually, grapes of any sort are in short supply this year. I've heard of a number of cancelled contracts by wineries selling to other wineries because of the scarcity of fruit. If you have sound fruit for sale you should have no problem selling it. The problem seems to be: will it ripen?

With the cooler weather, ripening has been very slow. Fortunately rain fall has been scarce throughout September. Sugar accumulation is creeping along in some varieties, and in some cases pH levels are rising fast. I'm guardedly optimistic that the quality will be good to very good in the early season whites. Reds look good so far. We'll just have to see how the weather holds up.

**Damage from pests**

One other major issue I've seen is damage caused by raccoons, deer, small birds and in some cases bears and turkeys. All other growers I've talked to, regardless of their location in Virginia, have reported a significant increase in damage this year.

I've been trapping raccoons since July. They are by far our biggest concern this year. I've caught 39 as of Sept. 9. Unfortunately, just like the kid with his finger in the dike, for every hole I plug, others just pop up. It seems like all of nature wants to get in on the grape eating act. After dodging the frost bullet and keeping Downey, Powdery and all the other mildews at bay, to have the little thieves in the night come and take significant amounts of your crop, makes for a less-than-happy grape grower!

► **CENTRAL:** (continued)

then we had to start again – rather like painting the Golden Gate Bridge!"

There was literally no time to mount the leaf puller, he said, which made for enormous fungal pressures — 17 sprays so far and counting, as of Sept. 17.

Netting was helpful to many, but it wasn't a panacea. Bill said the grapes protected by bail wrap did not keep deer at bay, adding that that kind of netting is easily damaged and can't be expected to last long.

**Successful netting**

"The most successful nets have been the heavy duty side nets which are small-meshed and extremely durable," he said. "Though initially expensive, they will prevent deer and even stink bugs and yellow jackets from getting on the fruit. Apparently they can be left out on the catch wire from one year to the next and all you need to do is "roll" them down or "lift-up" as necessary."

Bill said he's skeptical about leaving the netting out year round, and suspects that keeping the vines out of the netting will be more trouble than taking the nets down and putting them up each year. He plans to do a test plot and see how they fare.

SWD were a problem everywhere, and Christine Vrooman created a forum, which lives on the VVA website, to serve as a vehicle for collecting comments, observations, questions and recommendations for dealing with this particular pest. You'll find a link on the VVA's home page at <http://www.virginiavineyardsassociation.com/>.

For all the problems, many are seeing some hopeful signs. Emily noted that the grapes have a significant acid reserve, which would allow them to hang longer and continue to ripen. Jeff added that his red varieties had dark seeds and good flavor very early in the cycle, which he said was definitely an unexpected positive surprise, given the weather all summer.

Bill said he was excited by the harvest, particularly the potential for the reds. "Our white crop production, although good, is considerably down on previous years. Harvest is at least three weeks late for us in the Central Region and we have never seen acids so high or pH levels this low at this time of year. Hopefully this, along with continued good weather, will allow us to hang our fruit longer and bring about more phenolic maturity, which should give us tannins like satin. Let it shine, let it shine!"





# 'It ain't easy being green' — living with the Spotted Wing

By Christine Vrooman  
Ankida Ridge Vineyards

I can sympathize with Kermit the Frog in his lamenting being green. The challenges posed to vineyard growers in Virginia are seemingly growing faster than our canopies in this infamous summer of 2013 — “The Year of the Pest.” I am hearing of a multitude of them in all shapes and forms, from the microscopic fungal pycnidia to the grandiosity of the massive bear and nearly every wild critter in between.

It seems all of them are finding their way into vineyards across the Commonwealth this year.

One of the newer kids on the block has been destroying grapes at a rapid pace the last couple of years since making its way into Virginia from its origins in Asia. The Spotted Wing *Drosophila* (SWD) fruit fly is considered by many to be one of the most difficult insect pests to control. Its infestation can destroy a vineyard in a short amount of time, as it arrives en masse and reproduces by laying its eggs in perfectly healthy fruit, which is rapidly

destroyed as the eggs pupate.

Much has been written about SWD, its life cycle, control measures, etc., all available on the Internet. The disappointing aspect is the seeming lack of success in control in our region compared to other areas out west. We can only surmise this increase in control is due to climatic conditions peculiar to the Mid-Atlantic region, which favors high humidity and warm temperatures, a desired combination for SWD's proliferation.

We were hit by SWD quite hard in 2012, having been caught completely unaware of its presence in the region until we found it in our vineyard after it had gotten established in its reproducing cycle, which only takes a few days.

To prevent that reproductive cycle in the



As an alternative to insecticides, a trial spray with kaolin clay-based “Surround” has yielded some promising results at Ankida Ridge Vineyards in the ongoing battle with Spotted Wing *Drosophila*.

Photos by  
Christine Vrooman

vineyard seems to be key in preventing a severe infestation and loss of fruit.

Currently the only known control is the use of insecticides, unfortunately at a level far beyond what we felt acceptable for our vineyard and the natural surrounding environments and beneficial populations.

We wondered just how severe this pest was in other vineyards. I began talking to growers who confided that they too had been

severely affected by the SWD. Everyone was concerned they were facing another difficult season ahead.

To learn more about other growers' experiences and to share these experiences, successes and failures in combating the SWD, a forum was established — <http://swd.freeforums.net/thread/2/swd-forum?page=4>.

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taken the best root stock in the world – Norton — and crossed it with the best red grape variety — Cab Sav. This is the 6th leaf for the Crimson Cab, and I'd like to share what I've learned in an effort to help other potential growers overcome some of the issues I dealt with at the beginning.

Lucian was not initially linked up with a nursery so he supplied green growing cuttings. These are obviously much more delicate than dormant rooted stock, and that led to my first problem — not adequately watering them the first year.

I have a nice drip system installed for my vineyards but with predetermined hole spacing that did not supply water directly as needed to all of the young plants. We had a more normal — and scorching — summer that first year, so the plants suffered as a result.

If Lucian is still supplying cuttings, I would suggest a “soaker” type of irrigation system that would supply water to each delicate plant — at least for the first year or so as the plants mature.

This led to my 2nd year issue. I thought I had lost perhaps a third of the plants from lack of moisture. I ordered replacements — which Lucian supplied without question — and pulled out what I thought were dead plants the next spring for replanting.

What I then learned was that the rootstock was much more resilient than the previous year's growth suggested, and several (not all but a significant number) of the pulled out plants that I had just thrown in a pile actually began to show some spring growth.

So, don't move too quickly to remove suspected dead vines. Since this was originally a pollinated plant, what comes up from the roots is the actual plant.

Of course, much of this could have been avoided by watering them properly the first year. I was not so quick to replant the third (and fourth ) year, but I still had to replace probably some 60 plants or so — which Lucian again supplied.

The end result is that my vineyard now is pretty varied in plant maturity and will likely take another year or so get all plants producing equally.

I had a relatively small crop the fourth year, which I simply put in my Norton Port. But I began to learn an additional item regarding pruning. These vines — which I have put on a high wire trellis system — like to be pruned more like Norton than vinifera, and are more fruitful on the third or fourth buds rather than the basil which I did prune to that fourth —



COURTESY OF BOB CLAYMIER

**“The wine produced is unlike either of the parents,” Bob Claymier says of his unique Crimson Cabernet.**

and earlier — years.

Because of that correction in the 5th year (and plant maturity) I was able to make some 58 cases with last year's vintage.

If we can get anything ripe this year, I hope, at a minimum, to double that amount with the plants really rocking next year as the vines begin to have some degree of uniform maturity.

Now for spraying. Up to and including last year, I sprayed about half way between my Norton & Cab Franc — i.e. more than Norton but less than Cab Franc.

Last year was pretty challenging and I got some significant Downy in the Cab Franc but virtually none with the Crimson Cab. This year then — I had sprayed the C/C more like my Norton which is to say not much with only 3 sprays through June.

This was probably not the year to back off on spraying the C/C because I do now have some Downy that I'm going to have to be aggressive on to keep at bay — I also had some Japanese beetle damage that could have been prevented with more insecticide sprays.

The good news, however, is that if I had sprayed any other plant (except Norton) so sparingly this year, I likely would not have a plant left, considering all of the disease issues we've had. I will go back to a more medium spray program next year with another lesson learned.

In terms of the fruit, the clusters are very non-Norton like and more like a Cab Sav or Cab Franc in that they are larger — with larger berries — and more loosely packed. However, they hang more like Norton — at least from last year's experience — and one need not be tempted to pick too early.

I had a storm coming in last year, so I decided to pick a tad earlier than I would have liked, and had a TA of about 9 with Brix around 23. I tested some un-picked clusters some two weeks later and the TA was down almost 2 points and the brix up about the same.

I watched the hanging clusters and they did not fall apart at all as a vinifera would have done, but again were more like Norton in that regard.

Interestingly, Lucian reports that birds do not seem to attack the ripe fruit as much as some other varieties, and that was certainly my experience last year as well. I did not use netting last year, but simply used predator devices and found little bird damage.

I have done more leaf pulling this year so the fruit is more exposed than last. I hope this is not another lesson to be learned, but I will watch it closely as they begin to ripen to see if I have to use something other than the predator calls.

The wine produced is unlike either of the parents and I'm still trying to come up with a descriptor that fits. I like to stay away from all of the convoluted adjectives that many wine makers seem to delight in, but it certainly is going to be a big, bold, inky-black red.

I further suspect that more lessons will be learned in the cellar as time goes on, but the first effort is intriguing.

We did blind taste it at a VVA meeting and no one suggested it was in any way associated with Norton, which for some could be a good thing. It is now in the bottle — and still recovering — so I'm really interested to see what it is like after popping the first cork. You may have seen from the VVA newsletter that we recently auctioned off the first bottle of it for the nice sum of \$600 which I have donating to a local charity.

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From this platform we have learned that the SWD issue is far more pervasive than previously thought, with many growers realizing only after the fact that they had an infestation that had been the cause of fruit loss. I can't say it was comforting to read of so many others dealing with this issue, but the old adage, misery loves company, certainly holds true here, as we all welcomed input from fellow growers who were facing this challenge together.

Because we "lean green" at Ankida Ridge, we were uncomfortable with the frequent insecticide sprays that appeared necessary to keep SWD under control.

At the suggestion of our consultant, Lucie Morton, we did a trial spray with the kaolin clay-based product, "Surround," on a block of grapes. We sprayed only the Pinot Noir which they seem to love, while they ignore the Chardonnay. We applied the spray late in the season, 10 days before harvest when the brix was between 19-20, leaving one panel unsprayed. We followed label rate recommendations.

What we observed filled us with a great hope

that this product could possibly be the answer to a low insecticide solution to the SWD. We observed very little interest from the SWD in laying eggs on these berries. The fruit we harvested was clean and free of disease.

We could monitor the flies closely, as we (fortunately) have needed no netting on our vines the last couple of years, enjoying essentially no bird pressure, perhaps due to the cats, chickens and guineas we introduced into the vineyard last year. I don't know what else to which I can attribute the change.

So in the future, instead of our vineyard wearing a stripe of white from netting, it might just be wearing a stripe of white Surround spray from veraison on.

I am waiting to hear back from several growers who have also added Surround to their arsenal. Our grapes are just now entering the fermentation stage and to this point we have noticed no detrimental effects in the wine-making, but we are only just getting started. It will be interesting to see if colors, flavors, or the fermentation process are affected in any way.

Dr. Pfeiffer has mentioned the possibility of a research project based on the use of Surround. We welcome any input from anyone who has or is using Surround on their grapes.

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I planted it in a well prepared site that has good pH and soil minerality, good drainage and with a North to South slope. I virtually had no frost damage back in May except for some very small plants down at ground level.

I had to rip the site with bulldozer equipment and a 3 foot plow before planting due to thin hard pan soil —plus it had rocks the size of Volkswagen that were removed.

I'll be very honest in that I was frustrated with the plant development in the beginning and thought about ripping it out at times because it was so slow to get started. I'll be equally honest now in saying I'm glad I held on because I do think the plant does have real promise — both from the standpoint of disease resistance and, hopefully, the quality of the ultimate wine produced by this unique vine.

I think my experiences could really save other potential growers having to deal with many of the issues I've encountered. In addition, the plant is now more being grown in other states. Here is what Somerset Ridge Winery in Kansas has to say about the Crimson Cabernet Barrel Reserve that it makes:

"Reserve dry red wine. Somerset Ridge was the first winery in the world to make wine from the ground-breaking Crimson Cabernet grape. Intense dark fruit and blackcurrant flavors. Aged in new American oak barrels." For more, go to the winery's web page at somersetridge.com and click on "Wines."

Somerset Ridge was the first to produce a vintage in 2011. Mine (and theirs) then for 2012 is only the 2nd in the world. There is another grower in Kentucky, and I believe a new one in Connecticut as well, but those are the only ones I currently know of.

There were apparently two other plantings in VA the year I started, but they did not make it. One may have lost all to deer, and the other was perhaps not quite as patient as I.

My plants today do not look as good as they could due to my Downy issue, but that's another lesson learned to be filed away for next year.

Only time will tell what kind of fruit will be produced this year, and 2013 will probably not prove to be a good predictor for future crops, simply because of the incredible rain and disease problems we've all faced.

I'm more than happy to share my experiences with anyone interested.

By the way, I do have fun with some of my labels and have done the same with the Crimson Cab — a bit of a mystery grape that deserves the attached label of "Covert Cab"!!

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*A letter to Virginia's grape and wine industry members:*  
**A brief history and a 'thank you'**  
**from Dr. Bruce Zoecklein**

**A**s you know, I retired from Virginia Tech in 2010, but agreed to remain part-time for three years while the university attained the resources to fill the two positions created from my own. That has now happened. My graduate student, Molly Kelly, accepted the enology extension role, a position devoted entirely to the extension service. The other position is an enology research and teaching slot, which has been filled by Amanda Stewart. The Enology Service Lab that I created in 2006 to conduct chemical, physical, microbiological, and sensory analysis for the industry, remains in good hands.

I worked with the Virginia wine industry for almost 30 years – a long time. It seems like only yesterday that we were calling today tomorrow. It is my strong hope that my greatest legacy of achievement does not reside in a record number of failures.

For some, it may be hard to imagine how embryonic the industry was in August 1985 when I began at Virginia Tech. We had about 31 wineries making wine, some of which you could even drink!

Admittedly, when I first arrived, I was feeling a bit anxious. Many of my California friends and colleagues could not understand why someone would voluntarily move to Virginia to work with wine. Indeed, I was forced to endure jokes suggesting I must have been in some sort of witness protection program or, perhaps, I had been excommunicated from the west coast and they simply had not been told.

One west-coast winemaker suggested that he had traveled throughout the region and noted that Virginia producers suffered from what he called the “talking dog” syndrome. That is, people are so elated to hear the dog talk that they are not too concerned that he cannot talk very well. His point was that the only people pleased with Virginia wines were the folks who made them.

To add to my already vast sense of insecurity, one of my west coast friends sent a book authored by a leading wine guru of the time. Imagine my surprise when I discovered Virginia listed in the index. I quickly turned to the back of the book to locate the almost-full page on Virginia. While I cannot offer an exact quote, I certainly remember the gist. To paraphrase, yes, they do make wine in Virginia, but one has to ask why. This was

not simply a singular commentary on quality. He went on to ask why, since it was so much easier to produce wines in California, would anyone bother to grow winegrapes in the harsh environment of the mid-Atlantic? Fortunately for all associated with our industry, this author did not understand the soon-to-emerge interest in regionalism, including regional cuisine and tourism, in which Virginia wine fits nicely.



Soon after my arrival, and despite a promise to the contrary, I was given teaching assignments to add to my existing research and extension responsibilities. Even though I had approximately 170 undergraduate students a year, this three-way job responsibility worked adequately for a while. I was able to make frequent winery visits and conduct a number of short courses, workshops, seminars and roundtables. Nothing succeeds like success. However, with two lectures plus

one lab section per week on campus, it became increasingly difficult to conduct extension visits. By the early 2000s, the growth of the industry completely overwhelmed our enology program resources.

While Virginia Tech's support for the enology program has undulated dramatically over the years, the current interest could not be better. Today, I am quite satisfied that we have adequate enology resources with separate enology extension and enology research positions.

Likely I owe the Virginia Tech administration a belated thanks for exerting a certain degree of patience. I pride myself in always knowing the right thing to say, never, however, at the proper time it needs to be said. Despite my constant, yet relentless complaints about the lack of enology resources, they chose not to drop-kick me out the back door, although likely that was actively discussed.

Indeed, the vast majority of the administrators seemed to suffer from some sort of strange ocular dysfunction that made them see me as someone who was intelligent and, therefore, worthy of keeping around. I certainly appreciate their myopia!

Additionally, the Virginia Tech administration provided valuable advice upon my arrival,

some of which I even followed. The first was to always use care in the selection of graduate students. This was code for “always select graduate students that are smarter than you.” In my case, that was a very easy task, although I would occasionally do something right, just to confuse my students.

I am proud of the staff and students that we have had in the Enology–Grape Chemistry Group; many hold prominent positions in the food industry (that is where the money is), academia, and the wine industry.

The other advice offered by VT was to “always stay out of industry politics.” Unfortunately, that presumed I was smart enough to know what was political and what was not. From the early days of the Governor's Cup, to the Vintners Quality Alliance to the modern Commonwealth Quality Alliance and the WineBoard, I learned a very important and valuable trait about myself. That is, one of my greatest talents lies in my ability to be misunderstood by large numbers of people.

I feel quite fortunate to have had an academic career which has allowed me to speak and travel in 16 foreign countries. I like to travel; it always makes me think I am getting somewhere! Many of these regions have viticultural, enological and marketing issues similar to our own and are striving to gain recognition. I attempted to convey the knowledge gained from these experiences in my Enology Notes and other extension activities. I hope I was successful.

It is said- never make predictions, especially about the future. However, I predict continued success, growth, and recognition of Virginia wines. To the extent that the industry operates cooperatively, the potential is boundless.

Crafting fine wines in Virginia should include the resolution to keep things as simple as possible, but not simpler. This goes to a core belief that luck is the residue of design. That was the basis for my constant preaching about HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) planning.

A basic and important question is this: What knowledge is universal, and what is specific to time, place and circumstance-such as your site? As an industry, this distinction should not be blurred; it is an issue of relativism. Francis Bacon reminded us, “Genius is like fleet of

***“I am proud of the staff and students that we have had in the Enology–Grape Chemistry Group.”***

*Continued on page 9*



## Agricultural honor in Bordeaux

Lucie Morton, far right, was on hand at VinExpo in Bordeaux last June when her former professor, Pierre Galat, left, received the commander's title of the Order of the Agricultural Merit.

Lucie, one of only four ampelographers in the world, is the translator of Pierre's text, "A Practical Ampelography," into English.

Ampelography is the identification of grape vine varieties through the study of the vine's leaves and berries. We're planning to feature an interview with Lucie on this special branch of viticulture in a future edition of Grape Press.



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## A 'thank you'

*Continued from page 8*

foot, method is the right path. Fleetness of foot on the wrong path never leads to knowledge." We are certainly not in a static environment. To continue to compete, we must remember that the greatest obstacle to discovering the truth is in being convinced you already know it.

The teleological goal of our extension programs from the beginning was to help provide science-based information to supplement your artistry.

The achievements of the Virginia wine industry are the consequence of the confluence of a vast causal network of those past and present, each playing a part. Thank you for allowing me to be a component of this dynamic and exciting industry!

I am not sure I am ready for the future-but fortunately it hasn't happened yet. I will remain semi-active with the Enology-Grape Chemistry Group and continue to author Enology Notes ([www.vtwines.info](http://www.vtwines.info)), perhaps written for those that do not read.

Please feel free to call or write if I can be of assistance. You can reach me at 540-998-9025.

Thank you for your support and friendship!  
Sincerely,  
Bruce Zoecklein

# To harvest or not to harvest: That is the question

By **Andrew Hodson**  
*Veritas Vineyard & Winery*

The title sums it up — the toughest question the winegrower has to confront every year. The stimulus for this article was a series of workshops on Berry Sensory Analysis hosted by Virginia Tech’s extension agent, Molly Kelly, and her able assistant, Tremaine Hatch. Timely, inasmuch as we are approaching harvest, the workshops were held to help winegrowers answer the question of when to pick by reviewing sampling techniques and the principles and goals of berry sensory analysis that also included hands-on training in the application of a sensory berry scoring system.

The decision to pick is based on the premise that the “ripeness” of the grapes is the most important variable to consider when the other variables are eliminated. So, given that we have an unlimited labor pool, and or a machine harvester; that the weather is going to be fine for the next week; that we have not sprayed outside of the limits of the spray program that is agreeable to the winemaker; and that we have infinite tank space in the winery, how do we decide when to pick? Well, obviously, when the grapes are ripe!

## Determining ripeness

So when is a grape “ripe”? No matter who you talk to, you’ll be told, “It depends on what you mean by ‘ripe’.” Going back to the article I wrote in the Summer 2011 Grape Press about planting density, I suggested that the motto of the VVA should be *Is Justus pendeo*: It all depends — and it does.

In the good old days before we could measure sugar and pH and titrateable acidity (TA), using four of the five senses was the answer. How the grape looked, how it smelt, felt and tasted — the only sense you did not have to use was hearing! In other words, we had to use the greatest computer ever available to man — the human brain. You plug in four variables, and boom! Out comes the answer.

I like to quote Jim Law on this point, way back — say, all of 10 years ago — when I was attending a course Jim held on red winemaking. At that time I clearly remember Jim saying, “I used to run the numbers (pH, TA and sugar), but after a while I gave up because they just confused me.” He said he relied primarily on sensory evaluation. Of course I did not take Jim literally nor would he have wanted me to,

but it does illustrate the point, and the point is that the numbers on their own do not define ripeness.

As in most disciplines the combination of art (the sensory evaluation) and science (the objective measurement of chemical parameters) provides the best understanding of any modality, be it in medicine or wine making.

## A scientific view

So let us look at the scientific side of things. The reality is that a huge emphasis is placed on the things that we can measure, like sugar, pH and TA. It took me a while to realize, and this is winegrowing 101, that a grape can be perfectly ripe from a chemical standpoint and still be hopelessly under ripe from a sensory standpoint.

One of the best examples of this disconnect comes from the early days of Chilean viticulture. The then newly identified Carmenere (what up til then had been labeled as Merlot) wines were initially very vegetal with huge amounts of methoxypyrazines. It took a while for the growers to realize that although the sugar and Brix were at the right levels, the rest of the grape chemistry, such as the anthocyanin and phenol concentrations, were immature.

The concept of chemical ripeness versus physiological ripeness is central to the understanding of grape harvesting. Sensory berry analysis is a method developed originally in Montpellier by Jacques Rousseau and then further developed in Australia. (See Winegrape Berry Sensory Assessment in Australia by Erika Winter, John Whiting and Jacques Rousseau.)

The system uses a scoring methodology giving a score from the least ripe to fully ripe by assessing five qualities of the grape. As

each of the components of the grape matures so the score increases.

Like most scoring systems there is a long version and a more quick and ready one that can be used out in the field. The most useful aspect of the methodology is that it reminds me to systematically assess the properties of the berry, the pulp, the skin and the seeds. I am sure that the authors looked at the concordance of different observers with statistical parameters of variability and standard deviations that obviously justified the adoption of the method.

Like any instrument of measurement it is only as good as the discipline with which you use it. I prefer to use my on-board sensory system with my built-in personalized computer. However, I gained a lot in understanding the utility of having a systematized approach that is invaluable particularly in record keeping.

However, as long as one realizes the limitations of the system and recognizes that any scoring system is limited to ones’ own individual taste buds (as the French would say “Chacun a son gout” — each one to their own taste), then we can keep things in perspective.

There are many other laboratory measures that have been described that are good indicators of grape maturity from the glycosyl glycosides to the level of amino acids in the grapes, but no one measure is bullet proof and more importantly, readily available to the winegrower during harvest.

The take-home message for me was the need to take into account all information, be it sensory or scientific, about the maturity of the grape. Then, and only then, do you look at the available labor force, the hurricane map and whether your winery has enough tank space.

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# Early days for Early Mountain Vineyards

*(This article, which was reprinted from Mike Veseth's blog, "The Wine Economist," provides an outsider's view of the Virginia wine industry generally, and an economist's view of an experiment in marketing Virginia wine.)*

By Mike Veseth

It is still early days for Early Mountain Vineyards, the ambitious and progressive new project that Jean Case has started along with her husband Steve (of AOL fame).

The goal (and the challenge) goes beyond establishing a destination winery in the Monticello AVA. The Cases want to help elevate the profile of Virginia's growing wine industry generally.

That's a worthwhile aim, but not a simple or easy one in today's competitive market environment. As one friend put it, early days and a mountain to climb.

## Virginia wine mosaic

We were in Virginia to visit Sue's parents Mike and Gert who live near Richmond and came to Early Mountain on the advice Frank J. Morgan who writes the popular "Drink

What You Like" blog, which analyzes Virginia wine.

With about 200 wineries of various sizes and foci and 15 AVAs, Virginia presents the potential wine tourist with many choices. Frank suggested several interesting winery targets and I selected Early Mountain both for its proximity to Charlottesville and for its ambitious stance.

The Cases are big fans of all things Virginia and saw in the bankrupt Sweely Estate winery an opportunity to contribute to the wine industry here.

The Sweelys built an impressive facility — a 20,000 case winery and a separate spectacular hospitality and event center, but they were apparently better at making wine than selling it for profit.

Early Mountain (named for the famously hospitable Early family who lived in these hills in Revolutionary War times) rose from these financial ashes in 2011 with the double mission to add to the chorus of Virginia wineries and also help the whole industry open a new era.

## Best of Virginia

The most obvious evidence of this  
*Continued on page 12*



COURTESY OF MIKE VESETH

**"The most successful wineries know who they are and express this identity consistently."**

— Mike Veseth

# Late season disease management 2013

By Mizuho Nita

Grape Pathologist, AHS AREC at Winchester

Before I get to the topic, I have one announcement. We received funds to conduct a Pierce's Disease survey from Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, as well as the Virginia Wine board. If you have a suspicious vine, please let me know so that we can run a diagnostic for you.

Also, we are conducting virus and ripe rot collections. Please make sure to take advantage of these free diagnostic opportunities. Not only will it help you, but it will also help our research projects.

Now, on to the topic at hand. With the amount and frequency of rains we received, there are lots of things going on in terms of disease management.

I think the two most prevalent diseases are Downy Mildew and Botrytis. There have been so many disease risk events (I counted more than 20 infection events since July at the Winchester location) that it has been a

challenging year for everybody.

For Downy Mildew, your berries already became resistant to infection. However, your vines need foliage for ripening as well as for storing carbohydrates to its trunk for the winter.

A phosphite (aka phosphorous acid or phosphonate, PHI=0 day, FRAC=33) material would be the best choice at this point of time. You can mix it with captan (PHI=0 day, FRAC=M4) to add more protection against downy mildew.

The other potential mixing partners (listed by the length of PHI) would be:

- Ranman (PHI = 30 days, FRAC=21)
- Forum (PHI=28 days, FRAC=40)
- Presidio (PHI=21 days, FRAC=43), or
- Revus (PHI=14 days, FRAC=40)

Ranman and Presidio should have some kick-back activity, and both Forum and Revus have a protective activity.

Botrytis is known for its ability to develop a fungicide resistant isolate, so, please make sure to rotate mode of action (i.e., FRAC code). Examples of choices (listed by the

length of PHI) are:

- Endura (PHI=14 days, FRAC=7)
- Luna Experience (PHI=14 days, FRAC=7+3)
- Inspire Super (PHI=14 days, FRAC=9+3)
- Rovral (new name: Meteor, PHI=7 days, FRAC=2)
- Vanguard (PHI=7 days, FRAC=9)
- Scala (PHI=7 days, FRAC=9)
- Switch (PHI=7 days, FRAC=9+12), and
- Elevate (PHI=0 day, FRAC=17)

Note that some of them are mixed materials, i.e., make sure to have good rotation partners. Unfortunately, none of the material has a kick-back activity to speak of.

Finally, as you know, cultural practices are very important management tools for both Botrytis and Downy Mildew. An open aerated fruiting zone will not only promote quicker drying time (which means a lower risk of disease), but also better penetration of chemicals.

Good luck with the rest of the season, and hopefully, we will get to see more days with sunshine!!

# Early Mountain Vineyards

*Continued from page 11*

broader purpose is the Best of Virginia wine program at Early Mountain. The winery has partnered with the nine wineries shown above and promotes their products along with its own. This is done mainly through a series of tasting flights, only one of which is based on Early Mountain wines alone.

The rest feature a mix of products from the ten different producers carefully selected by Michelle Gueydan, a sommelier employed specifically for the Best of Virginia program. The flights are changed up periodically to both broaden the range of wines so promoted and to encourage visitors to return repeatedly to see what's new.

I understand that there are also plans to eventually channel winery profits to promote Virginia wines in line with Case's Revolution concept of social entrepreneurship. Profits seem a long way off, based on my back-of-the-envelope calculations of revenues and costs, but a patient capital philosophy rules.

## Early days for wine identity

We enjoyed platters of local cheeses and meats, which paired very well with an Early Mountain Pinot Gris. The focus on local producers was both clear and delicious. We then turned our attention to a red wine flight that showcased four wineries and four grape varieties or blends. The Barboursville Sangiovese (they are owned by the Italian Zonin family) and the '08 Early Mountain Merlot were Gert's favorites among the reds we tasted. I was attracted to a distinctive Petite Verdot.

I'm optimistic about this project (as I am about the future of Virginia wine more generally), but I think everyone agrees that it is still early days.

Early Mountain is still building up its wine portfolio, which necessarily takes a few years to accomplish. (If you were starting from scratch you would wait for the wines before opening the hospitality center but the desire to seize the opportunity caused the cart to be put ahead of the horse for now).

My perspective is that the components for success are coming into place and need to be lined up effectively into an identity for the winery and a message for the industry. I think the Early Mountain project is about Virginia hospitality and while that is clear in a sensual way when you step into the big open room, it could be communicated more explicitly in other ways.

The Early Mountain wines themselves don't seem to have an identity yet, but that is perhaps natural since they are still works in progress.

But they will need to be more clearly defined at some point, too, and that is not a trivial problem. The most successful wineries know who they are and express this identity consistently from first greeting through the wines and the wine experience on down to the product design and promotion materials and throughout every member of the staff.

## An American wine dream

The Best of Virginia idea is a good one, but at this point the wines more or less speak for themselves and while visitors might find individual wines that they enjoy from around the state, I would like to see a better developed educational element to draw them progressively into Virginia wine in a way that includes the varieties and styles, the wineries, the AVAs and the terroir and of course a cultural element that connects to local history and cuisine.

An educated consumer is more than just a buyer — she can be an ambassador for Virginia wines and that's where the real pay-off comes. It might seem like I am demanding a lot — and I am — but this is a rare opportunity due to the resources and commitment of the Case family and it would be great if it succeeded on all fronts.

This is not just Early Mountain's problem, of course, but an issue that the Virginia industry needs to wrap its head around.

Right now it seems to this outsider that the Virginians, like wine producers in many regions, are working through the debate about the need for a signature grape variety. Viognier? Cabernet Franc? Petite Verdot? It seems to me that this is an unproductive debate (or maybe a counter-productive one).

Virginia makes lots of different wines (Barboursville apparently makes a helluva Nebbiolo — who would have guessed?) from many grapes varieties in many styles (something the Early Mountain flights demonstrate). Defining the region by one grape or two wouldn't do justice to this diversity.

Virginia also makes some disappointing wines, as is the case with most developing wine regions, and the store shelves feature many sweet wines and fruit wines, too, which may be very good but certainly provide a mixed message.

Perhaps a focus on more consistently high quality (and not signature grape) is the road ahead? I think that's part of the



COURTESY OF MIKE VESETH

Best of Virginia plan — to draw attention to high quality and try to raise the bar for everyone.

As the recently published American Wine by Jancis Robinson and Linda Murphy teaches us, America is full of wine and wineries — they are not just in the big states or made by the big producers. I dream of an America where wine is made everywhere and enjoyed everywhere. Early Mountain can be a part of that dream. I wish them success.

Thanks to Allison, Dave, Steve, Erich and Jacob at Early Mountain for their hospitality and willingness to answer all our questions. Thanks to Frank for his advice.

Thanks to my most senior research assistants Mike and Gert for their able assistance and to Sue for photographs and her sharp eye and keen ear.

*This article was first published June 4, 2013 on Mike Veseth's blog, <http://wineeconomist.com>. Mike is the author of two books on the wine industry, *Wine Wars* and *Extreme Wine*. For a review of *Wine Wars*, which explores a number of significant trends in the wine industry, see "Wine Wars: Terroir's Last Stand?" at <http://projectsunlight.net>.*



# The latest news ...

By **Bill Freitag**  
Toll Gate Farm

The Virginia Sustainable Winegrowers self-Assessment Guide (VSWAG) now has 41 registered users. The bad news is that only 10 of those users have completed the entire guide with its 13 major topics consisting of 109 viticultural best practices. OK, I know we're all very busy at this point of the year, and I, too, would rather make sure my crop remains clean while ripening to perfection instead of doing something not critical to my survival. So this note is more a nudge to get you to look at the VSWAG once the harvest is complete and then use it as a post-season tool to review how well you did.

## For any newbies in the crowd

For the newcomers to the association who may be unfamiliar with the tool, the guide resides online on the VVA website under its own tab, which is named "Sustainability." The tool is user-friendly and intuitive to use, requiring little if any formal training. However, training is available and includes a help site with online videos covering an array of topics and webinars. To sign on and begin using the guide, go to <http://vswag.virginiavineyardsassociation.com/login>. The tool will let you start filling out the guide, save your answers if you need to stop, and then pick up later where you left off. Make sure you log off after each session.

## Some statistics

I just received several spreadsheet tools from our contractor, AGSquared, that give me significant insight into how the tool is being used. For example, while only 10 users have completed all topics, many users have completed at least some portion of the guide.

| Topic | Name   | No. Completed | Max score percentage |
|-------|--|---------------|----------------------|
| 1     | Pre-plant considerations                                 | 16            | 96%                  |
| 2     | Soil Management, fertilization and irrigation            | 13            | 100%                 |
| 3     | Vine training and crop/canopy management                 | 13            | 100%                 |
| 4     | Groundcover and weed management in established vineyards | 12            | 97%                  |
| 5     | Pest management  | 12            | 100%                 |
| 6     | Disease management                                       | 10            | 97%                  |
| 7     | Arthropod Management                                     | 11            | 100%                 |
| 8     | Vertebrate management                                    | 11            | 100%                 |
| 9     | Pesticide safety and management (this has no practices)  | N/A           | 94%                  |
| 10    | Pesticide storage  | 12            | 94%                  |
| 11    | Pesticide mixing and handling                            | 12            | 100%                 |
| 12    | Pesticide application                                    | 12            | 100%                 |
| 13    | Grower/employee education                                | 10            | 96%                  |

See the table above for the overall completion rates by topic heading and the maximum score by percent of possible score.

While we have 41 registered users, the number of users by Wine Region who have created one or more blocks is shown below. In other words 14 users have not created a block description yet.

| Region              | No. of Users |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Central Virginia    | 7            |
| Chesapeake Bay      | 1            |
| Eastern Virginia    | 1            |
| Heart of Appalachia | 1            |
| Northern Virginia   | 10           |
| Shenandoah Valley   | 6            |
| Out of State        | 1            |
| <b>All Regions</b>  | <b>27</b>    |

Another thing that I see is a number of users have created multiple blocks, each showing a different variety of vinifera, which leads me to ask if each of these blocks is truly being farmed differently than the others. If not, then you are creating extra work in trying to fill out

multiple blocks when one block would do the trick of describing your operation. There is no problem in creating additional blocks; I just want to remind you that you may be making unnecessary work for yourself.

## Next steps

As you begin to fill out your guide, I'd like to ask you to make notes to determine any technical problems with the tool's functioning. As you proceed with your work, please keep a list of potential software problems such as: Something doesn't calculate correctly, the tool fails to save an entry, or if any other such problem crops up, please report it using the contact form in the tool. One caution: You will not see any scoring for topics that are incomplete.

On a separate list, please suggest any enhancements that you believe would make life easier for you as a user. This second list is critical because any major changes may require an add-on to our current contract with AGSquared. Please send your findings/suggestions to me at the following email I've set up: [vswag6@gmail.com](mailto:vswag6@gmail.com). Have a great harvest.

# Beyond 2015: A strategic plan for the industry

By **Jim Benefiel**  
Benevino Vineyards

Approximately 50 invited members from the Virginia wine industry met near Richmond in July to update the industry's strategic plan that was published in 2010. That plan was called Vision 2015, therefore this session was called Beyond 2015. The members came from vineyards, wineries, distributors, education, and state government, representing the multiple players

and perspectives of our industry. Participants divided into groups, each discussing in detail one significant aspect of our future. VVA was officially represented by Tom Kelly, Jim Benefiel and Bill Freitag. In addition, several growers attended.

The major statement from the earlier session was that the Virginia wine industry would double by 2015 (from 2010). Participants at the July session conceded that this was unreasonable, and referred to the Virginia Wine Strategic Marketing Plan published by

the Virginia Wine Board last December, which sought to:

1. Improve the quality and uniqueness of Virginia wines.
2. Enhance the image and reputation of Virginia wines and the Virginia wine industry.
3. Increase and expand the market share of Virginia wine sold in state, national and international markets.
4. Improve the profitability of vineyard and wine businesses in Virginia.

*Continued on page 15*

# Technical study tour: Alsace, Burgundy, Champagne

By Bruce Zoecklein

A nine-day technical study tour of Alsace, Burgundy and Champagne, will be conducted by Professors Bruce Zoecklein, Virginia Tech, and Pascal Durand, University of Burgundy. The study tour will be to the most famous vineyards, and will feature wine and great food from some of the most prestigious winemakers of these regions.

Also featured will be the gastronomic pleasures of each area.

Dates: December 5-13, 2013

This is the 8th technical tour that we have conducted. Previous travels have included Bordeaux, Spain, Provence, the Loire, the Rhone, and Burgundy.

Several write-ups about our Technical Study Tours are posted at [www.vtwines.info](http://www.vtwines.info) under Enology Notes.

■ AOC's of Provence, Enology Notes #138

■ Languedoc, the Rhone, Bandol and Castes, Enology Notes #152

■ Spain and Bordeaux, Enology Notes #164

For additional information or questions regarding this tour, contact me at [bzoeckle@vt.edu](mailto:bzoeckle@vt.edu) or call me at 540 998 9025.

**Who Should Attend:** This is a technical tour and designed for commercial grape growers and winemakers.

## Tour Schedule

■ Thursday Dec 5 : the participants meet at Reims, capital of Champagne for a first tasting in the afternoon and a dinner at the hotel.

■ Friday Dec 6 : Morning at Reims for touring Roederer/Pommery, lunch and afternoon on "Côte des rouges" touring small wineries, Tasting and dinner by Veuve Clicquot. Night in Reims.

■ Saturday Dec 7: Early departure for Epernay and the "Cote des Blancs". Tour and tasting at Moët/Perrier Jouët. Lunch and departure for Alsace and Strasbourg.

■ Sunday Dec 8: Relaxed morning to visit Strasbourg (Cathedral/Christmas market). Lunch and afternoon in the vineyards next to Strasbourg. Dinner and night at Strasbourg.

■ Monday Dec 9: The wine route of Alsace to Colmar. Stops at Ribeauvillé and Riquewihr. Winemaker dinner at Kienstein.

■ Tuesday Dec 10: Early departure to Burgundy and Côte de Beaune vineyards (Puligny Montrachet/Volnay/Beaune/Corton). Night at Dijon.

■ Wednesday Dec 11: Day in Côte de Nuits (Gevrey Chambertin, Vougeot, Vosne Romanée).

■ Thursday Dec 12: Early departure for Chablis (visit and lunch William Fevre). Farewell dinner.

■ Friday Dec 13: Tour downtown Dijon in morning (farmer market...) depart for Paris airport by train.

Additional details regarding specific hotels, etc. will be forthcoming.

**Cost:** Cost includes all in-country expenses (hotel lodging, transport, food, all expenses expect personal items), and is based on single vs. double room occupancy as follows:

\$3800 for a single room

\$3200 for sharing a room (two people per room, double beds)

Because participants will have different airline schedules, you are responsible for

lining up your train transport from Paris airport to Reims (our starting point) and your return from Dijon back to Paris. Both trips are relatively short.

We will reimburse each traveler 50 Euros for each trip (which is the cost of this transportation if lined-up a month before travel). I can help you with this booking, if needed.

Cost does not include transportation to and from France.

Registration:

■ Reservations can be made by sending a non-refundable, \$250 deposit to: Dr. Bruce Zoecklein, Department of Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24060.

■ No slots will be held without a deposit check.

■ Technical Study Tours are restricted to commercial grape growers and winemakers.

■ The maximum enrollment is 16.

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# Wine Council roundtables with gubernatorial candidates

By **Katie Hellebush**

Director, Virginia Wine Council

As Virginia's wineries and vineyards prepare for harvest, our candidates for statewide office are in the home stretch, reaching out to voters in advance of the November 5th election. The Virginia Wine Council has been hard at work, reaching out to and working with the candidates to ensure they fully understand the issues and intricacies of the wine industry before Election Day.

During the past four years, the Virginia wine industry has seen the value that a supportive administration can have on our industry. The current administration focused on industry promotion and promoted laws and regulation that encourage wine making and grape growing. In fact, Virginia was recently named #1 in the nation for consumer wine access due to our wine friendly laws and regulations.

Critical to continuing on this path of success is the next administration's understanding of the economic contribution of Virginia vineyards and wineries so it too may promote the industry and stand by educated policy decisions that encourage the industry's success.

As part of the Virginia Wine Council's outreach, we held roundtable discussions with our gubernatorial candidates. Participating in the "Meet the Candidate" forums were representatives of the industry. On Aug. 8, we held a roundtable with Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe at Paradise Springs Winery; on Aug. 22 we held a roundtable with Republican candidate and Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli at our office in Richmond.

Both events were attended by winery representatives from across the Commonwealth, and the sessions provided an opportunity to understand each candidate's positions and hear what their administrations would do for Virginia wine:

## Roundtable with: Terry McAuliffe (D)

McAuliffe, a businessman and entrepreneur, discussed his campaign platform with particular emphasis on economic development, promotion and trade. His priorities would include promotion of Virginia's agriculture industry, including trade missions to increase Virginia's agricultural exports. McAuliffe discussed

working with the industry to increase in-state grape production and opening new markets to Virginia wine as a way to support the rapidly growing \$750 million Virginia wine industry.

He spoke of the success of the recently established Agricultural & Forestry Industry Fund (AFID) and Farm Winery & Vineyard Tax Credit, and his intention to help the industry invest further in vineyards producing quality wine grapes.

In addition, McAuliffe recognized the economic contribution of the wine industry to tourism in attracting more than 1.6 million tourists, and generating \$131 million in tourism expenditures.

McAuliffe commented on the importance of broadband and transportation infrastructure to doing business around Virginia and spoke of workforce development in our community college system, healthcare, and education.

## Roundtable with: Ken Cuccinelli (R)

Attorney General Cuccinelli discussed his campaign platform and said he recognized the success of the Virginia wine industry. Cuccinelli identified regulation as one of the largest challenges for the wine industry and spoke to the need for business friendly regulations at all levels of government.

He commented on the success of Virginia's top agriculture industry and on the economic contribution of the wine industry, including wine and agritourism. In addition to discussing transportation, the Attorney General discussed the importance of property rights and then fielded questions on the Fauquier winery ordinance and the recent Attorney General's opinion declaring certain provisions unconstitutional.

Cuccinelli also discussed the industry's focus on expanding vineyards to support the growing wine industry.

Cuccinelli also commented on the importance of transportation infrastructure and the port system to doing business around Virginia and spoke to the necessity of business friendly taxes and regulations to our future.

*For more details on our statewide candidates, the impact these offices have on the wine industry, or legislative concerns, please contact Virginia Wine Council Director, Katie Hellebush at [Khellebush@AllianceGroupLtd.com](mailto:Khellebush@AllianceGroupLtd.com).*

# Beyond 2015

Continued from page 13

5. Maintain and enhance Virginia's rural character and beauty through the expansion of Virginia's wine industry.

6. Facilitate the development of complementary supply and service industries for the Virginia wine industry.

The major statement from this year's session was that the lack of vineyards retards the growth of the Virginia wine, and that the number one priority for the industry should be to increase the amount of vineyard acreage by 1,600 acres over the next eight years. Without such growth, responsible officials acknowledge that the agritourism component of our industry might be severely affected, if an increasing portion of Virginia-produced wine is acknowledged to come from lower-priced California areas.

Tom Kelly and Jim Benefiel sat on the vineyard group and identified several actions to stimulate vineyard growth, including: cooperative purchasing; leasing specialty equipment (e.g., harvesters); expanding research/extension; expanding technical training courses / regional (and on-line) delivery; continuing development of new cultivars; initiating dialogue with private credit facilities; and addressing labor issues.

With particular regard to how the state could assist in vineyard development, the VVA Board has since met telephonically, exchanged drafts, and sent a letter to State Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Todd Haymore. In that letter, the Board has called for a cost-share program, similar to that for forestry, in which growers' purchases of vine for new vineyard planting are partially reimbursed by the state.

The Board has suggested to Secretary Haymore that a 50% cost share (i.e., reimbursement) of vine purchases would support up to 200 acres per year at a cost of about \$250,000 to \$300,000 annually. The officers noted that, because of the high value added by wine, the state amounts would be self-funded — each \$1 in one-time state funding will return up to \$18 per year in state excise taxes for 15 to 20 years. Further, there is no need to enact new taxes, as this amount could be funded by redirecting a portion of the current 30 cents per bottle excise tax or by redirecting the Virginia wine industry state tax credit.

The officers felt that state financial incentives to plant vines will truly result in "putting down roots" in Virginia, doing more to grow the industry than other current programs. Virginia wines sourcing Virginia-grown grapes supports agritourism and maintains land in productive agriculture. Our proposal has precedent with other agricultural/forestry commodities, and could be extended to other high-value Virginia agricultural products.

We ask that you consider sending a letter to your state delegate supporting the VVA proposal.

# Beyond the winery: Why social media matters

By Frank Morgan

(Frank's well-read blog, *Drink What You Like*, focuses on Virginia wine. This article is the first in a series. You'll find his blog at: [DrinkWhatYouLike.wordpress.com](http://DrinkWhatYouLike.wordpress.com).)

These are exciting times for the Virginia wine industry. With continued record year-over-year sales growth coupled with glowing profiles in publications like *Forbes*, *Food & Wine Magazine*, *Departures Magazine*, *Wine Enthusiast*, and *The New York Times*, the buzz about Virginia wine is growing like never before.

The favorable ink from the global wine press is overdue, and great for the Virginia wine industry as a whole. It's great to see Virginia wine receiving much deserved national and international press.

For those working in and around the Virginia wine industry the suggestion that our Commonwealth is the next big U.S. wine region isn't news, and didn't surprise Virginia's long-time wine fans. What did surprise some, however, is how quickly these stories — the Virginia wine buzz — spread through the social media sphere as Virginia wine enthusiasts linked these articles on their Facebook pages and posted them to Twitter accounts, which were then reposted and reTweeted.

Because of social networks like Facebook and Twitter, many of these stories crossed the globe and were seen by thousands that would not otherwise have been exposed to Virginia wine.

And that highlights a weakness in Virginia's growing wine industry: though the Commonwealth's wines can stand up to those from any region in the world, many Virginia wineries are behind — and some are way behind — the social media curve.

Social media is a term that's frequently used, but not always well understood. Wikipedia — the collaboratively edited, free internet encyclopedia — defines social media as a means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.

There are lots of key words in this definition, including "interactions," "sharing," and "communities," concepts that speak to connections and loyalties.

While conducting research for this series, I was disappointed to find that dozens of Virginia wineries do not have an online social media presence — not even a simple Facebook page that is updated regularly. For those wineries that do have an online presence, many had abandoned winery blogs

or Twitter accounts after just a few posts.

These wineries are missing important opportunities to engage with current customers and connect with a different group of potential customers.

Leveraging social media networks allows small wineries — like many of those in Virginia — to level the playing field with digital exposure that can positively impact their bottom line.

According to one study — *The Effect of Customers' Social Media Participation on Customer Visit Frequency and Profitability: An Empirical Investigation* — published in the March 2013 edition of the journal, *Information Systems Research*, "Customers who engage with a company's social media efforts spend more on its products." This study confirms that social media interactions between companies and customers helps boost the bottom line.

Specific to the wine industry, the study reports, "customers who interacted with a wine retailer's social media network visited stores 5.2 percent more often and contributed 5.6 percent more revenue than customers who had a similar shopping history at that retailer but no online involvement."

Further, the costs associated with engaging consumers via social media is smaller than running ads in many print publications. One full-page ad in nationwide wine publications like *Wine Spectator* can cost up to \$30,000.

Given these facts, why haven't more Virginia wineries fully embraced social media tools to engage current and potential consumers?

"No time and/or money to devote to the Internet" is the reply I hear most often from Virginia vintners when I ask them why they are not using digital tools to engage consumers and nurture current customer relationships.

I can understand this response. After all, farming a vineyard and keeping up with all the many tasks involved in getting a bottle of wine to market is the primary purpose of a winery.

However, given the pace of technological change (ugh, this sounds like a cliché), embracing social media to directly engage with consumers is no longer optional for those wineries that want to expand beyond the tasting room into other U.S. and even global markets.

Admittedly, social media isn't a panacea — it won't make bad wines good — but it can help the vast majority of the Commonwealth's wineries that are producing high quality products connect with a large and growing audience.

## How should a winery get started in the world of social media? Here are some basics:

At a minimum, establish a **Facebook page** for your winery. Facebook is the #1 website in the world according to at least one study, so be there! If your winery already has a Facebook page, consider new ways to engage with your customers — ask for reviews or post food and wine pairings.

Establish your winery as a check-in location on the location based service, **Foursquare**, so customers can check in during visits to your tasting room.

Set up a **Twitter** account and be part of the Virginia wine conversation — #VAWine on Twitter. (More on hash tags like #VAWine in the next installment.)

And most importantly, let your customers know about your **Facebook page, Instagram, or Twitter account** and ability to check-in at your winery on **Foursquare** by including reference (or links) to these accounts on your tasting sheets, placards displayed on the tasting room bar, via your email newsletter, and with postings on each of these services.

Finally, register for a free **Vintank Social Connect** (<http://www.vintank.com/social-connect/>) account to monitor your winery's brand mentions across social networks like **Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, LinkedIn** and blogs, online discussion boards and online wine review sites like **CellarTracker**.

— Frank Morgan

Like it or not, social media will play a significant role in shaping the next chapter of the Virginia wine story. So, get engaged and be part of it!

*The next installment of this series will explore some of the most popular social media tools being used in the wine industry — Pinterest, Facebook, FourSquare, Twitter VinTank's Social Connect, and Google Alerts.*