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The Quarterly Newsletter of the VIRGINIA VINEYARDS ASSOCIATION

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A Growing Season for the Books

How 'Biblical Rains' at One Vineyard Affected Fruit Set, Vigor and Disease

(Editor's Note: Jim notes that he writes this at the beginning of harvest, so his comments pertain only to the growing season and not to the vintage.)

By Jim Law
Linden Vineyards

My first year growing grapes in Virginia was 1981. For the past four decades, 2003 has been the benchmark for the

worst growing season ever. I'm now ready to pass that title to 2018.

I write a journal on Linden's website, and the May 21 entry was titled "Biblical Rains." The next entry, June 4, was titled "Biblical Rains II." Subsequently, I realized that this was about to become a never-ending bad sequel.

The rain began in mid-May and, with the exception of a two-week respite in early July, it continued well into August. The three problems we encountered were poor fruit set, excessive

vigor, and disease pressure.

Poor Set

Set was poor to non-existent in young vines, high vigor soils and Merlot. The flowers stayed wet during most of bloom. I was impressed that there was any set at all.

Cabernet Sauvignon did best. Too well in fact, as its tighter than usual clusters are more

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AMPING UP CRITTER CONTROL



Courtesy of Dean Triplett

Dealing with challenges in 2018 for Dean Triplett of Greenstone Vineyard in Loudoun County included installing electric fencing to keep out pests such as deer and raccoons. See his Regional Report, Page 4.

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Participate In Vineyard Research

By Joy Ting
Winemakers Research Exchange

As the 2018 growing season is (thankfully) coming to a close, now is a good time to look hopefully toward next year. Is there anything you would change in your management practices, given your experience with 2018? Is there a new technique, procedure, or product you might want to try next season?

These are the kinds of questions we address through the Winemaker's Research Exchange (WRE), which is a collaboration of wine producers around the Commonwealth working to improve the quality of Virginia wine through production-level experimentation.

The purpose of the WRE is to assist producers in structuring experiments, support them in the execution and analysis of results,

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nate@walshfamilywine.com

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vitis@vt.edu

Business Manager

Tracy Kirkman

vavineyardsassoc@gmail.com

Grape Press/Website Editors

Bob Garsson

rgarsson@gmail.com

Chris Garsson

cgarsson@gmail.com

VVA Mailing Address

P.O. Box 168

Waterford, Va. 20197

vavineyardsassoc@gmail.com

Special thanks to:

Paul Krop, Jim Law,

Mizuho Nita, Joy Ting,

Dean Triplett,

James S. Turpin


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IN THE VINEYARD

Participate in Vineyard Research

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and share findings with the broader community.

Anyone who grows grapes or makes wine in Virginia is encouraged to participate. If you have a specific problem in your vineyard and you want to explore a solution, or if you have read about a new technique or heard about a new product and would like to test it out, you can propose an experiment to compare approaches.

WRE, which is funded by the Virginia Wine Board, will help plan projects to ensure acceptable levels of scientific rigor, consult on implementation, coordinate the shipping of samples, organize and fund laboratory analyses, and summarize and present results. These WRE services are free.

Experiments can include interventions in the vineyard or the winery, as long as the experiment ultimately gets made into wine that can be analyzed and tasted. Study subjects can range from trellising, soil and clones to ripening and harvesting.

In addition to producer-initiated experiments, the WRE sponsors repeated experiments, working with multiple partner vineyards and wineries to do similar experiments. This helps to determine if a solution is specific to one site or broadly applicable to others.

We also work with academic partners like

Virginia Tech and private consultants to extend vineyard experiments to production-level wines.

Group projects for 2018-19 include harvest decisions based on phenolic ripeness in red wines and Petit Manseng harvest decisions.

Another way to benefit from the work of the WRE is to read results of past projects. All experimental results are posted publicly on our website (www.winemakersresearchexchange.com).

Take a look at the website, read some studies, and see if there are any procedures/products you are interested in trying for yourself.

WRE experiments are officially approved beginning June 1, but can be planned and begun prior to this time.

If you are interested in planning an experiment for the 2019 growing season and would like WRE support, please let me know (VAWREX@gmail.com) and we can start planning an experiment.

The WRE strives to grow and evolve along with the industry itself.

We recognize that great wines begin in the vineyard, and as such, welcome vineyard experiments.

(Editor's Note: Joy is the research enologist and exchange coordinator for the Winemaker's Research Exchange.)

The VVA Website Helps You Stay Current!

Who's selling grapes or equipment on the VVA Exchange page? Are there viticulture workshops I should know about? Stay up to date by visiting virginiavineyardsassociation.org, which now offers more features, resources and tools for grape growers in the Commonwealth.

And if you'd like to see your vineyard showcased on the website, send us a photo of your vines, your grapes or your harvest. Photos can be emailed to cgarsson@gmail.com along with details about the photo and who gets the credit for taking it (please be sure you have the rights to have the photo published).



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▶ **EASTERN VA.:** “Wow! A combination of factors for a stressful season.”

By Paul Krop
Good Luck Cellars

Challenging year! What a statement, Paul! Rainiest May on record in most parts of the state. Sixth rainiest June. Eight inches here at Good Luck Cellars in the first ten days of July, then dry the rest of the month. August, hot and humid with high dew points and heavy overnight dews throughout the month and sporadic heavy thunderstorms.

Wow! A combination of factors for a stressful season. Many vineyards in the Eastern area had similar findings. We kept up with our spray program, plus leaf pulling. (There are never enough workers available at critical times.)

Jeanette Smith’s guidance and spray program, with a nice mix of FRAC codes, had us feeling optimistic at times. However, late season appearance of downy mildew and powdery mildew was heavy, but mostly in Vidal Blanc and Chardonnay. With brixes

stalling out and pH rising, we’re picking earlier in most varieties by ten days, compared to 2017.

Poor fruit set and aborted cluster development has left us with between 40 and 50 percent of the crop we harvested in 2017.

Dr. Tony Wolf warned us in his July report to anticipate many of the problems that might present, and he called it right.

We picked Petit Verdot in our 12-year-old block at 20.8 brix, though our young three-year-old block recorded 23.0 still in small volumes.

Summary of the Season

Do: Pull leaves early, shoot thin and shoot position early, get bunch sprays in before cluster closure, hedge often, bird net when maturity suggests (making sure hedging is done), and stay with a good spray program with appropriate pest targets and varied FRAC codes.

Don’t: Pray for more rain.
Enjoy the coming cool weather!

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► NORTHERN VA.: “Vines that grew like weeds have made for a tough season ...”



Courtesy of Dean Triplett

After losses from wildlife, Dean Triplett is planning to put up netting almost a month earlier next year. Shown is his Merlot under bird netting this year.

By Dean Triplett
Greenstone Vineyard

Harvest of 2018 is over for me here in Loudoun County and it couldn't happen a moment too soon. But before I start crying into my beer, let me quickly rehash this year.

Late summer could be summed up with three words — heat, humidity and rain. Lots of rain! We had over 40 days of temperatures in the 90's from May till September, with high humidity the norm, despite a couple of breaks here and there.

Since May, the region has had at least 40-plus inches of rain. As a consequence, while powdery mildew wasn't too much of a problem, downy mildew has been a major concern region wide. I don't have an accurate number for the percentage of vineyards that have had serious problems this year, but it seems pretty high.

Lower yields in some varieties due to poor weather at fruit set either last year or this is another issue facing many growers. What will 8 inches of rain this June mean for next year's crop?

Along with the downy problems, vines that

grew like weeds have made for a tough season for all growers.

I've been fortunate to have had a pretty clean vineyard up to harvest, thanks to a good crew that has been able to get out and do the trellis work needed in a timely fashion. Seventeen sprays didn't hurt either.

But late season downy has decided to rear its ugly head in the youngest leaves in a number of my varieties along with spotty botrytis in some clusters despite our best efforts.

I've been lucky with the rainfall this summer in that I've been able to get out and spray between rain events and pretty much stay on schedule. Folks that either couldn't get out or made the choice to extend sprays this year have felt the pain.

I've learned to appreciate dumb luck. For example: a storm came through on Aug. 21. I talked to Bill Hatch of Zephaniah Farm Vineyard at the Loudoun Wine Growers Association meeting the next day, and he said he got 2½ inches of rain that night. My vineyard is about a mile and a quarter from his as the crow flies and I got ¾ of an inch of rain during the same event.

That's kind of the way it's been all year for me. Plenty of rain but less than many people

got. The old saying “I'd rather be lucky than good” might have something going for it.

Around the region, a number of wineries are working with sparkling wine production this year. Katie Desouza at Casanel Vineyards & Winery is making a sparkling Chardonnay and Emily Hatch at Zephaniah is working on a sparkling Chardonnay.

Willowcroft was one of the first to harvest, picking Muscat Ottonel on Aug. 23 both from their vines and mine for Lew Parkers Riesling/Muscat Ottonel blend. (Interestingly, after I first planted my Muscat Ottonel vines twenty years ago we typically harvested fruit shortly after Labor Day. It's been a decade since it's hung that long.)

In both of our sites, we decided to harvest the fruit as much from ripeness considerations as from damage concerns. In my case, it looks as though I lost half my crop, mostly to raccoons, but also deer and birds. I got my netting up toward the end of July but have decided that the beginning of July, before any sign of damage has occurred, has to be the time to set the bird netting.

I also placed electric netting around most

See *NORTHERN* on page 5

NORTHERN VA. (cont.)

NORTHERN, from page 4

of my vineyard this year. That has stopped the deer damage I was seeing and has slowed the loss due to raccoons as well. Again, I'm going to have to deploy these tools earlier than I have in the past to mitigate as much damage as possible.

The problem with doing this earlier is getting the labor to do so when we need it, along with everything else that's going on in the vineyard. Timing in the vines has always been, and will always be, critical.

The other problem is that netting makes it so much more difficult to get any trellis work done that might be needed once it's up. Still, for all the problems, I think it's vital to try and keep Momma Nature at bay.

I also purchased a trail camera to set up in the vineyard. These things are cheap, and they're reliable enough to tell you exactly what is visiting the vines day or night. They also help in letting you know if your deterrent efforts are working.

September was a continuation of the summer, only worse! Rain, more rain than we got in 2011, was the word of the month. While we did get some breaks here and there, rainfall totaled about 9 inches for the month. Needless to say, wineries have been scrambling to harvest fruit as fast as possible, especially whites and also reds for rosé early in the month.

It seems that everyone decided to pick Seyval, Chardonnay, Viognier, Albarino, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminette, you name it, all one on top of the other.

Of course, all this makes for difficulties finding picking crews. And at my place when we have picked, sorting out botrytis in some sections as the guys move through the vineyard has slowed us down.

The botrytis I'm seeing is worse in ends of the vineyard rows nearest the tree line. In some cases I think grape berry moth damage has been a contributing factor. While I did see grape berry moth activity, Japanese beetles this year were no problem at all. At this point I'll take all the small favors I can get.

Late season reds have been the real question mark as this harvest rolls along. Fewer wineries will be making red wine than we normally see. In many varieties, maturation of the fruit has pretty much stopped. A number of wineries picked earlier than they'd like just to get in what fruit they could (does that sound like 2011?). Others have decided to play the waiting game and see if what finally has turned into nice October weather can rescue the late season.

What all this means for the final quality of the wines produced this year remains to be seen. While we missed the worst effects of Hurricane Florence, we did get the tail end of it as it moved north up the Ohio Valley and gave us days on end of rain.

In my case, we decided to leave the Petit Verdot and Cab Sauv until after the hurricane was gone and see if I stayed lucky! As it turned out while the quality was not what I'd have loved to see and the quantity was down, we did harvest fruit. We'll have to see what the talented winemakers I sell to will make out of it. While this has been less than a banner year, (the glass is half full), some nice wines will be made this year, I'm sure. Great might be asking for too much.

I used to think 2003 and 2011 were the two toughest years I've experienced. But 2018, I think it's safe to say, can be added to their ranks. This would have been a good year to buy sugar futures!

Vineyard Soil Conference Open To Grape Growers

The Virginia Association of Professional Soil Scientists (VAPSS) will conduct a two-day vineyard soils training event that is open to vineyard owners on Nov. 1-2 at Barren Ridge Vineyards in Fishersville, Va.

The conference will feature a number of speakers and presentations over the two days with a focus that will include the importance of vineyard soils with respect to grape and wine quality, vineyard soil evaluation techniques, available vineyard soil and vineyard siting resources, and how soil can affect wine sensory properties.

VVA members are eligible for the VAPSS special membership rate when registering for the conference.

[Click here](#) for more information and registration details.

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Funding Available for Growers in Southern Va.

The application process is open for both new and current growers in Southern and Southwestern Virginia who want to be considered for grant awards aimed at increasing vineyard acreage in the Commonwealth. The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR), which has been named by Virginia's Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC) as the new program manager of the SOVA Vineyard Development and Expansion Program, is now accepting new applications for grant awards.

Through the program, established in 2016 to encourage the planting of more vineyard acreage, "a cost-share award of up to \$3,000 per acre is available for qualified vineyard growers — reimbursing 33 percent of eligible expenditures. Vineyards with up to nine acres may receive a maximum award of up to \$15,000, and those with ten or more acres may receive a maximum award of up to \$20,000," according to an IALR news release.

The funding is awarded through a competitive process. "To be considered for the program, new growers must establish at least three acres of new vines, and existing growers must be willing to plant a minimum of one new acre," according to the news release. "Eligible cost-share items include, but are not limited to, grapevines, hardware for trellis systems, fencing and irrigation systems."

To learn more about eligibility requirements, including a detailed map of eligible counties, visit TRRCgrape.com or contact Program Manager Amy Turner at amy.turner@ialr.org or (434) 766-6788, who can help growers with the application process.

Vineyard grower workshops and grant program interest meetings are also being planned, so check here or on TRRCgrape.com for updates.

IALR will work with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, TRRC and the Virginia Vineyards Association to encourage the expansion of vineyard acreage.

A Growing Season for the Books

SEASON, from page 1

susceptible to bunch rots, which is a very rare phenomenon with Cabernet.

At Hardscrabble there are a few vigorous soil sections where Cabernet is planted. We use these grapes for rosé. Most of these vines had no grapes due to poor set, whereas nearby vines in more appropriate soils needed to be cluster thinned.

Young vine Hardscrabble Sauvignon Blanc set very little fruit whereas old vine Avenius SB, just a mile away, had a full crop. This young vine/old vine phenomenon played out also with Chardonnay. Merlot is notorious for having poor fruit set problems under less than ideal conditions. It lived up to expectations.

Excessive Vigor

Never have we hedged so much. In most growing seasons two passes are sufficient, but in 2018 I lost count. We hedge by hand using Christmas tree machetes when the shoots are tender, then switch to long-handled shears when the shoots become more lignified.

Usually by the end of July the vines cease their vegetative growth, and commensurately hedging also ends. In 2018, the vines continued to grow through August.

Out of desperation I purchased a heavy-duty electric hedger that made the operation go faster, but the vines didn't exactly look well coiffed.

When a growing season is uncommonly wet I allow weeds (native cover crops) and grass to grow in order to compete with the vines and slow them down. I started 2018 with this mindset, but eventually it became apparent that air circulation in the cluster zone was becoming compromised.

Grass was cut. Weeds were controlled and vine vigor kept on going.

Disease

Timing of spray applications was tricky. Finding windows of opportunity was always a challenge. Nothing was done without checking radar first. Kickback fungicides were critical in 2018. Well-timed June sprays, along with aggressive cluster zone leaf removal kept the fruit disease-free.

The problem was with upper canopy downy mildew (DM). In June we were able to prevent DM due to "Big Gun" spray materials and a still manageable canopy. July was all about controlling outbreaks of DM on young leaves. At this stage copper is my preferred DM fungicide.

In 2018, we experienced some foliar copper burn, as the dense canopy would only slowly dry in the morning. By August it became evident that no amount of spraying would stop DM from developing on newly emerging leaves.

Efforts turned to managing DM by hedging off the susceptible young leaves that were infected or about to be infected. At this stage in the growing season they would be of little use to ripening anyway. Older leaves were resistant to DM infections.

The vines were handicapped going into ripening. Even healthy leaves had an odd chlorotic hue. Shoot growth continued through August, slowing the transition of photosynthetic energy from the vegetative stage to ripening grapes.

One can always find a silver lining. This spring we planted two much-anticipated non-irrigated vineyards of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. They are off to a strong start.

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Trying Out Bags on Berries

Looking at organic methods to combat fungal disease in the vineyard

By Mizuho Nita, Ph.D.

Grape Pathologist
Virginia Tech

The total acreage of certified organic grape production in the U.S. has increased from 12,575 acres in 1995 to 38,664 acres in 2011. However, only three Virginia vineyards have been approved by the USDA for their organic management practices for wine grape production, and only two have a winery as of 2018.

The main reason why organic wine grape production is not common in Virginia or any other state east of the Rockies is the presence of fungal diseases, which are driven by frequent rain events during summer months. Thus, my grape pathology lab at Virginia Tech has established two experimental vineyards with financial aid provided through the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Although we identified several cultivars that may do well with the organic practice, there are two significant challenges: black rot, which none of the chemicals certified by the Organic Materials Review Institute works on sufficiently, and a potential loss of copper fungicides due to a trend of tighter regulations in other countries.

Copper products have been listed among candidates for substitution in the EU countries, which is reviewed every year. The European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency have identified risks to farm workers, birds, mammals and soil organisms from copper compounds.

If the EU decides to ban the use of copper products for organic production, U.S. regulations may change as well.

Rather than searching for other



Mizuho Nita

Based on 2017 data, the earlier bags were applied in the vineyard, the better the result in protecting the grapes.

chemical components, which is usually in the hands of chemical companies, we proposed to the USDA's Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension (SARE) an on-farm grant to examine the efficacy of various paper bags or umbrellas to individually protect grape clusters (grant ID: OS17-107).

These bags and umbrellas are made out of water-resistant paper, designed to fit grape clusters and are easily applicable with an embedded wire. The bags have small holes for ventilation and water drainage, and can be expected to last for a whole season.

This practice is commonly used in Japan where the restriction of fungicide usage (e.g., they can apply mancozeb only twice a season) is stricter than that of the U.S.

Based on 2017 data, bagging significantly reduced disease incidence and the severity of black rot. Also, it showed that the earlier that bags were applied, the better the result.

Clusters bagged at pea-size resulted in 95% reduction in black rot severity, compared with non-bagged control clusters.

Although 2018 data is yet to be analyzed, we saw a noticeable difference in disease intensity as well as yield.

As you can imagine, application is very labor intensive.

Based on our experiments, the bag cost was about 4.5 cents (including an expedited shipping fee), and, on average, we were able to apply bags at a rate of 2.5 bags per minute per person. On the other hand, organic grower Karl Hamsch of Loving Cup Vineyard & Winery in North Garden, Va., told us about the extremely high cost of intensive removal of diseased berries, which is necessary for his production when he is not using the bags.

One potential negative effect of this practice is the coloring of grape berries. We observed noticeable reduction in color with bagged clusters. This could be due to the shade provided by the bag, as well as higher temperatures within the bag. When we compared temperature profiles between ambient and within-bag, temperature tended to fluctuate more in the bag.

Although we only have one set of wines to be examined in 2017, a report from the

Virginia Winemakers Research Exchange showed that raters were able to notice the difference between bagged and non-bagged treatment in wine. There was no clear indication that one wine was favored over the other.

The effect of bags on wine quality will be investigated further in future studies.

Currently, we are looking into different types of bags (e.g., different thicknesses of paper bags, clear bags, etc.) to determine if we can reduce the effect of shading.

In terms of disease management, this method can be a good alternative to the fungicide application or a complementary method to reduce fungicide usage in general.

Although we tested out the bagging for the organic practice, it can be used for conventional grape growing, especially if you are concerned about disease and fungicide residues on berries.

I would not imagine everybody needs to use this method; however, if you are considering organic production or looking for a good method to reduce fungicide usage against cluster rot diseases, it may be worth considering testing it out.

Taking a Look at the Building Code

Group considering effects on agritourism facilities

By James S. Turpin

Virginia Wine Collective
Virginia Wineries Association

Over the course of the summer, the wine industry and other agribusiness interests, as well as representatives of state and local government, have been working on a study requested by the House and Senate Committees on General Laws regarding rural commercial building codes.

Following pressure from a number of local governments, at least three proposals were introduced in the 2018 session of the Virginia General Assembly relating to rural commercial building codes.

The study began with interviews and questionnaires being answered by industry representatives, other agricultural representatives, public officials and others. This effort was conducted by the Cooperative Extension's Dr. Martha Walker, which then paved the way for further discussions at the stakeholders meetings of which there have been two.

Using the findings from the survey and interviews that Dr. Walker collected, and the information provided during the presentations, the stakeholder team was asked to consider:

- ▶ What should be included in a building code for agritourism facilities.
- ▶ Whether the proposed building code requirements would create any barriers for agritourism growth.
- ▶ What economic impact would the suggested building code changes have on agritourism operations.

The team was also asked to provide a discussion of the proposed requirements from the perspective of the visitor, the farm owner, emergency and building officials, and local government.

A stakeholders' meeting was held on June 12. The wine industry was well represented. The overall tone of the meeting was positive. There appears to be a basis for the development of a consensus.

A proposal developed by Albemarle County and the Monticello Wine Trail became the focus of the discussion. That proposal focused on the following potential requirements:

- ▶ Emergency lights at exits.
- ▶ Exit doors with panic hardware.
- ▶ At least one handicapped-accessible

restroom with handwashing facilities.

▶ Some type of potable water for patron use.

▶ A handicapped-accessible route into and through the structure.

▶ Portable fire extinguishers.

There remained a variety of questions regarding definitions and scope. Two subcommittees were created to work on these issues during the interim — one to look at definitions and a second to look at the different applicable categories of the building code.

We continue to have good support from our agricultural allies, the representatives of the Department of Housing and Community Development, and Albemarle County. This gives us a good basis on which to build toward finding a solution that is workable for all parties.

There is a consensus developing that the focus should be on the definition question, deferring additional action on developing a building code until a later date.

This would show progress to the General Assembly and establish a better basis for going forward.

While we are committed to working with our agricultural allies, we continue to be prepared to defend our position alone if we are again targeted in the 2019 session.

Dr. Walker will compile a report and

distribute it to stakeholders for review and feedback. A revised draft was to be distributed.

The workgroup met on Sept. 11 and will be meeting again before its report is delivered to the General Assembly in November. It is likely that work on the issue of building codes will continue into next year.

There will be more information forthcoming on the study as it progresses. Right now, it is imperative that we gather information to gain a better understanding of the impact of items related to the building and fire codes. We need your feedback.

Everyone should have received a survey from the Virginia Wineries Association on this subject in late August or early September. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire, which will enable us to better understand the current state of the industry's members and develop our position going forward.

This is not the end of this issue. This process is likely to continue for the next two to three years. We are actively representing the interest of the industry in this important matter.

The Virginia Wine Collective represents the industry on legislative and regulatory matters. It is made up of representatives from the Virginia Wineries Association and the Virginia Vineyards Association, and is administered by the Virginia Wineries Association.

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