

West Virginia's growing wine industry

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grow best under the conditions found in West Virginia

In Wyoming county, West Virginia, County Extension Agent C. Glenn Runions is involved in a family farm research project. Studying the feasibility of a variety of agricultural enterprises, including grapes and wine production.

In that relatively mountainous terrain, Runions has had the most success with American varieties Concord and Niagara. He's also had good luck with Seyval Blanc and Aurora, two grapes used in making white wines.

Androczi, with his vineyards located in central West Virginia, speaks equally well of Aurora and Seyval Blanc's performance. He grows many other varieties and finds the Swenson Red variety, used in white wine production, grows well in his area. Androczi grows Foch, Chancellor, and St. Croix, among others, and he rates these the tops for West Virginia red wine production.

Two rather well-known varieties, Chardonnay and White Riesling, are not suited for West Virginia, Androczi says, because the summers are too humid, the



This orchard, owned by Frank Androczi, is used to research the best varieties for West Virginia. Androczi shares his findings with other members of the W.Va. Grape Growers Association.

winters too cold. Certain other table grape varieties also require winter protection. A mulch is commonly utilized.

Chardonnay apparently does a little better in the drier, warmer climate of West Virginia's eastern panhandle counties, as the West-Whitehill Winery in Keyser, Mineral county does produce a small amount of Chardonnay.

Both Androczi and the Wyoming

county state/private research farm use smooth wire to trellis their grapes.

In addition to red and white wine, Androczi, a beekeeper, also makes "honey mead," soon to be sold under his label as melomel. This centuries-old beverage is made with honey and fruit juices, mainly apple, grape, and pear. It has a sweet, pleasant taste, particularly after being aged

at least three years.

Profitability

Androczi contends it is possible to net \$4,000-5,000 per acre in West Virginia with grapes. Grapes offer another advantage to growers—with the exception of a few wine varieties, most grapes are equally desirable for table use or winemaking.

"What you cannot sell for table grapes, you can make into wine," Androczi explains.

Can West Virginia become a Napa Valley of the East?

Well, not yet...But Fisher Ridge Winery near Charleston made 25,000 gallons last year. The West-Whitehill Winery crush in 1983 yielded 2,000 gallons.

And if Frank Androczi has his way, wineries—his and others—will very soon increase in number and/or production, and will definitely rival California's famous wine country.

Of the wine produced now in West Virginia, Androczi states unequivocally:

"It's better than California's."

Soybean acreage lowest in eight years, ASA says

ST. LOUIS, MO — Fewer soybeans will be planted across the United States this year as farmers react to signals from both the market and the field.

In its annual planting intentions report — released May 9 — the American Soybean Association forecasts that U.S. farmers will plant 63.1 million acres of soybeans. That's 4.6 million fewer acres than last year, and the lowest acreage in eight years.

Dennis Sharpe, head of the Soybean Association's corporate

relations and economic analysis department, coordinated the survey. He says the low acreage numbers yielded few surprises in the market.

"Farmers throughout the country are reacting to the price signals from the marketplace," says Sharpe. "That's the philosophy of the Soybean Association. If the market tells farmers to grow less soybeans, they grow less beans. In the longer term, that's good. Farmers will eventually see profits return because of the smaller acreage."

The Soybean Association's survey targeted the South for the largest percentage decrease in soybean production: down more than 3 million acres, or nearly 15 percent.

"The decline in Southern soybean acreage is not a new phenomenon," says Sharpe. "There is a need for good crop rotation in the South after years and years of continuous soybeans."

Some fields in the Southeast have been in soybean monoculture for 20 years. Planting continuous beans contributes to the buildup of pests and diseases, and limits the range of herbicides available for weed control. Rotation crops such as corn and the more drought-tolerant grain sorghum are taking a chunk out of Southern soybean acreage.

Sharpe says planted acreage is only one variable in the market equation. The effect of a small soybean crop on prices will be clearer later in the season when yields are more certain.

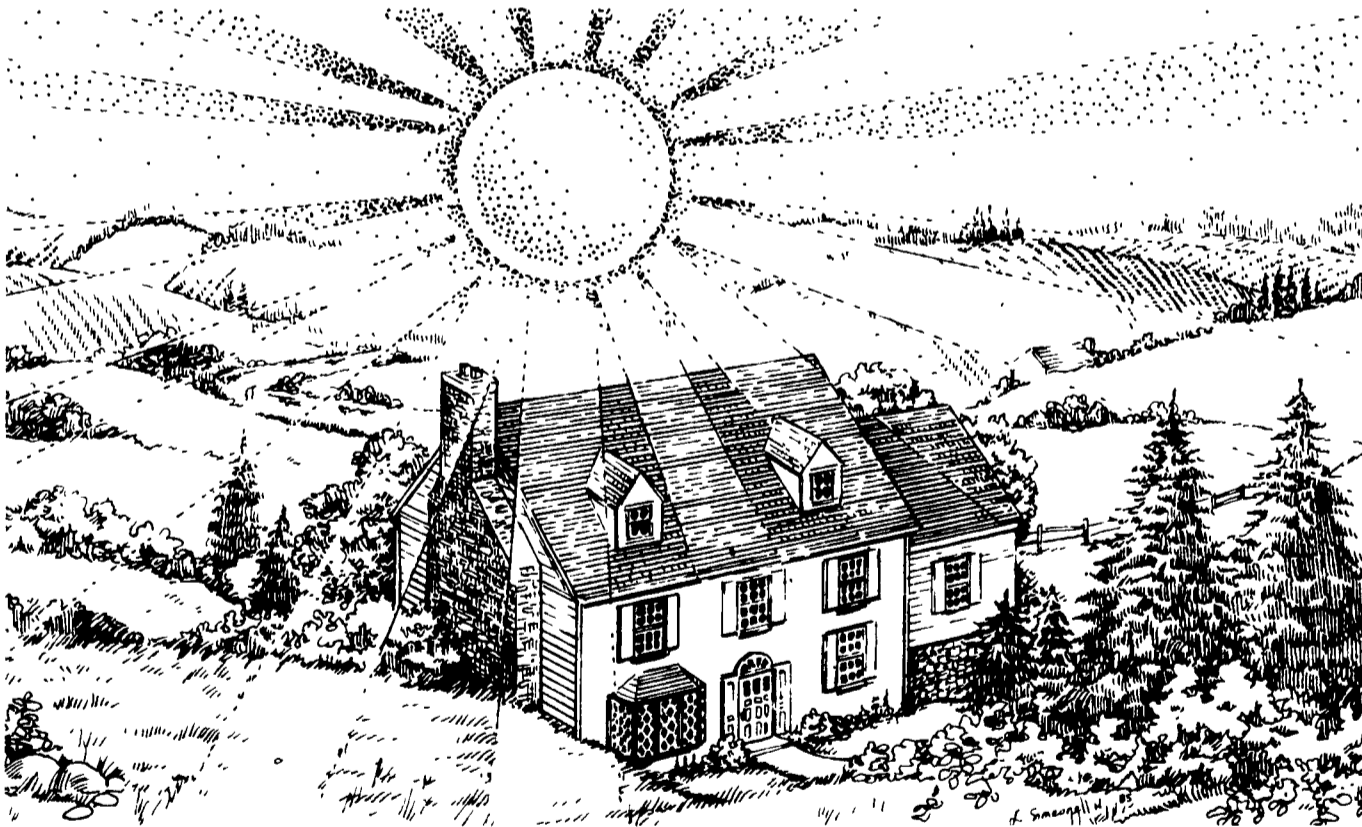
The planting season in many parts of the country has been dry and some climatologists are predicting a drought year. Although it's too early to predict the weather, Sharpe says the low planted acreage figure will hold significance should a drought emerge.

"I can't say what the weather will be like in July or August," says Sharpe, "but I can say that a planted acreage of 63 million acres sets the stage for a significant rally if dry weather develops."

Since 1980, the Soybean Association's planting intentions survey has reflected actual plantings within 3.5 percent, and in the last two years has been within one-half percent. According to Sharpe, the survey results provide valuable information for a farmer's decision-making process.

"The Soybean Association believes soybean farmers should have access to the same information commercial buyers and sellers gather," Sharpe says.

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