

# Winegrower Tastes Benefits Of Research, Hard Work

(Continued from Page E4)

"vinefira" types, because they are the biggest sellers in the area. Most of Waltz's grapes are pre-contracted in the spring to local winegrowers. The price depends on the ability to deliver good-quality grapes.

Grape quality depends on a lot of factors, including pH and sugar content, but the most important criteria is taste. As September harvest time approaches, Waltz regularly tests all three.

"If you want good quality grapes, you have to wait until the best flavor," he said. "Make sure the taste is there, not just the right (pH and sugar) numbers."

Quality is affected by the heaviness of the fruit set. Thinning the fruit is often necessary earlier in the season. But rain during blooming time can "automatically do the thinning for you," Waltz said.

Three to six tons of grapes per acre is a typical yield for the varieties Waltz grows. He estimates that he harvested 4-5 tons per acre this year, a yield that was boosted with the help of some overhead irrigation. A ton of grapes produces about 160 gallons of wine, depending on the type and pressing method.

The grapes are harvested by hand, with the help of Waltz's friends and family. Mechanical grape harvesters exist, but Waltz said the machines can break canes and create the potential for crop losses.

It takes about 60 hours per acre to prune the canes in the winter. Along with the attention required during growing season and harvest, Waltz estimated a total of 250 hours of labor per acre each year to tend the grapes.

"I thought tobacco was a lot of work," he said. Beside the labor-intensive nature of growing wine grapes, "the timing is more crucial" as well, and the grapes are "not as forgiving."

A substantial start-up investment was required, including a tractor that can fit between the rows to cultivate and hill the rows.

Even with all the work and investment, the wine grape business holds promise, according to Waltz.

"It looks good at this point," he said.

As for the 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot wines being made from Waltz's grapes?

"Quality-wise, it's looking like it's going to be a real good year."



Waltz uses a small plow to hill the rows in the fall to prevent freezing of the grafts near the vine bases. The hills will also help control weeds next spring.

## Mark Your Calendars For Convention Feb. 4-6

(Continued from Page E1)

full-day vegetable school. The annual Grower Reception and Dinner will conclude the day.

The second day will feature full-day sessions on direct marketing, greenhouse ornamentals (bedding plants and

perennials), and potatoes, plus half-day sessions on weed control, small fruit, irrigation and wildlife management. The fourth annual Ice Cream Social that evening will offer a relaxing opportunity for growers to visit with each other informally.

The final day will feature full-day sessions on small fruits and cut flowers plus half-day sessions on pumpkins and fall ornamentals; vine crops; tomato pest management; tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant; processing tomatoes; and organic production.

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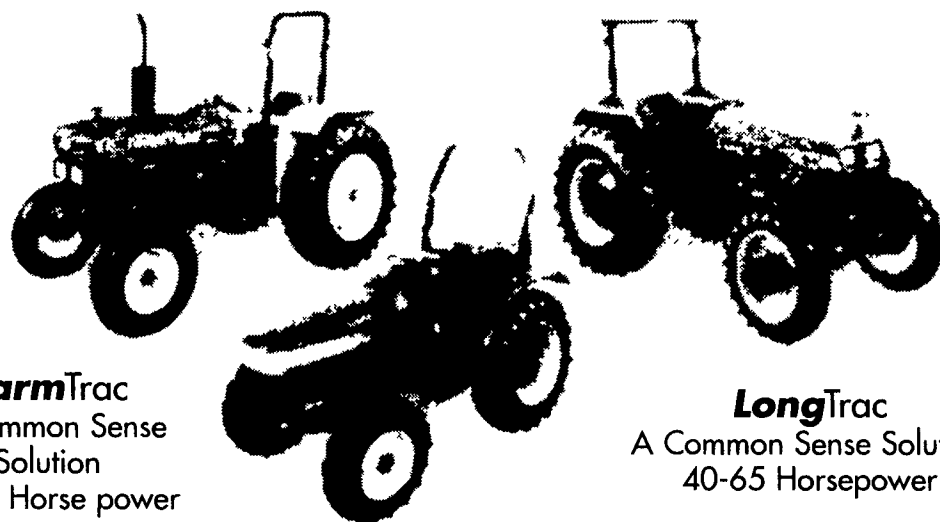
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