

Learn More About Vineyards In Pa.

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I am the wine grape agent for Penn State Cooperative Extension. Officially, I cover a 16-county region in southeast Pennsylvania, although my work has taken me to every corner of the state and the surrounding region.

I'm guessing that a lot of regular *Lancaster Farming* readers are not aware of the presence of a wine industry in Pennsylvania. Most of the wineries are small, family owned and operated businesses that tend to be off the beaten path, often in scenic corners of the commonwealth.

Since the Farm Winery Act of 1968 allowed for the establishment of small wineries, the numbers has grown to its current 70 wineries. Along with those wineries are more than 100 independent vineyards that supplement the wineries' own vineyards. Just for the record, these vineyards, in almost all cases, are separate from the vast sea of process grapes that grow along the

shores of Lake Erie, whose juice is used to make juice and jelly products.

The wine industry in Pennsylvania is very small compared to some of the more traditional ag commodities, but it is increasing both in size, recognition, and economic significance. The vineyards produce about 4,000 tons of grapes each year that are processed into almost 600,000 gallons of wine. That sounds like a lot, but in reality it's about the production output of a medium-size California winery.

Wine is a very attractive value added product for the agricultural community in Pennsylvania. A ton of grapes produces juice valued at \$1,800. Once that is processed into wine, it can easily reach a value of more than \$8,000.

Vineyards and wineries offer other assets to state and localities such as agritourism, jobs, and opportunities for associated hospitality industries such as hotels and restaurants. One has to only consider the billions of dollars in revenues that wines bring to areas such as Washington, Napa Valley,

and Oregon to realize the potential impact that this industry can have on the state. Its also a high-profile, glamour product that brings respect and polish to the state's image.

Because of their relatively high return on investment, vineyards can also be used as an agricultural hedge against unchecked urban growth. There are a lot of good reasons for vineyards to prosper in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has a rich history in grape cultivation. The first commercial vineyard in America was planted by Pierre Legaux along the banks of the Schuylkill River near Philadelphia. Grapes thrived in the southern counties before spreading north to Lake Erie. Of course, prohibition in the 1930s put an end to wine

production and it wasn't until 1968 that the modern wine industry began.

Pennsylvania has a variety of features that make it uniquely suited to high-quality wine production. First and most importantly are its soils. Both along the Erie belt and in the warmer confines of the Piedmont Plateau in southeast Pennsylvania, the soil types tend to be well drained and very suitable for the cultivation of the prized vinifera grape varieties (for example, Chardonnay, Riesling, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc.) from Europe. The climate, especially below the Appalachian ridges, appear to be moderate enough to sustain these more delicate European varieties.

The wine industry has just experienced two of the best vintages in memory. These exciting wines will prove the value and potential of grape growing in Pennsylvania.

The vineyard and winery communities are also getting support now from key partners, such as the state legislature and Penn State. Researchers are working on problems related to wine grape production. And the state government is increasing its funding for marketing and research. The wine industry itself has just recently created a commodity board that places a program charge on wines produced in Pennsylvania. These funds are used to promote our wines and for education and research.

The wine industry is on the move. It has so much to contribute to the overall welfare of the commonwealth and the agricultural community. As I drive around the beautiful hills and valleys of my 16 counties, I envision vineyards as far as the eye can see. We have everything we need to make this a reality. We just need to do it.

Assembly Shines To New York Wines

ONEIDA, N.Y. — The Assembly has passed legislation sponsored by Assembly Agriculture Committee Chairman

Bill Magee (D-Nelson) that clarifies the right of tourist tasting centers operated by duly licensed winners or farm wineries to sell wine on Sundays. This bill, which has passed the Senate, who also sponsored by Senator John R. Kuhl (R-Hammondspport).

"This is an important piece of legislation for

New York's wineries as a large and growing percentage of the sales from these stores are due to tourists and travelers on Sundays," Magee said.

Although these satellite stores have been selling wine on Sundays for 16 years pursuant to legislation that was passed in 1984, it was just recently that the New York State Liquor Authority issued an opinion that clouded the issue and this bill addresses that issue.

"The wine and grape industry is an important and growing segment of New York ag-

riculture and we must do everything we can to continue to encourage its growth," Magee said. "Obviously, if these stores had been forced to close, it would have had a resoundingly negative effect on our wineries and grape growers."

"This legislation will safeguard the current investment by winery growers in promoting New York wines, but will also keep the wine industry well positioned for years to come," said New York Farm Bureau President John Lincoln.

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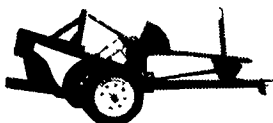


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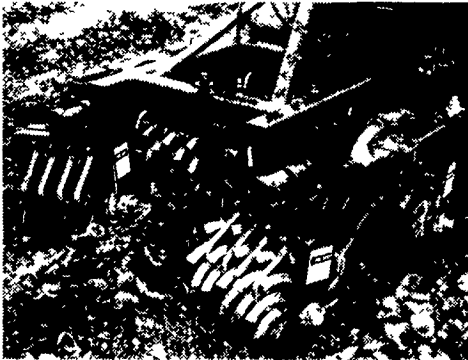


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