



FINGER LAKES VINEYARD NOTES

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MY FINAL FAREWELL! AND A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

David Peterson

By now, most of you know that I have left my Extension Specialist position to join Swedish Hill Winery in Romulus, which is owned by my family. Although I officially left Cornell in early October, I have been working on a hire-back of 1 day per week, to keep continuity in the program. Interviews for the position are being conducted in mid-December and the position is expected to be filled early in 1997. I plan to continue my part-time appointment until the new specialist arrives.

I will truly miss many things about the position which I held for the past 7 years, but it does

make it easier knowing that I will still see many of you throughout the year.

As this will be my final newsletter, I thought that I would make a few comments on the industry as it stands and where I think it will be headed. Looking back over the past 7 years, I can't help but feel optimistic about where the industry is headed. The 1980's were difficult for growers throughout New York and acreage declined by about one third in the Finger Lakes alone. Juice grapes (as production was increasing rapidly in Washington), Native American wine grapes and many hybrid wine grapes were in substantial excess, sales of "traditional" New York wines were plummeting, and the small farm wine industry was struggling to establish itself and really did not impact the grape market significantly. The only apparent shortage was for *vinifera*

varieties and there was only one or two buyers and the quantities purchased were minuscule.

Today, yields are higher than they were 10 years ago (making growers more competitive), there is a shortage of white juice grapes (Niagara), the "traditional" (bulk) NYS wine industry has shown some signs of stabilizing, and the market for premium wine grapes is growing in leaps and bounds.

What will growers need to do to take advantage of the situation?

- Efficiency will continue to be the key to survival for those growing for the juice or bulk wine industries. These products are very price-sensitive in the market and processors will be unlikely to raise prices significantly and will keep the pressure on growers to raise grapes at lower costs per ton. Growers using expensive and inefficient systems such as Umbrella Kniffin for Concord will be unable to compete. Machine pruned cordon trained vines will need to be the system of the near future, and higher density systems will make sense for new plantings once the equipment becomes readily available. At the same time, growers will have to be keener in their other management practices to maintain higher yields (vine nutrition and water relations will be a key issues).
- Site selection always has been one of the most important factors in determining vineyard profitability. Growers need to consider what varieties are suited to their sites and whether or not the site they have should be planted to grapes at all. For those that can afford it, it may make more sense to seek out new sites. Many of the best ones are not currently planted to grapes. For those planting Niagara, sites that have a restricted rooting depth or are prone to cold injury are likely to restrict yields. I certainly would not plant Niagara on a site that I thought would produce only 6 tons per acre on average. For premium wine grapes, sites that are not subject to frequent cold injury are critical. In addition, growers will need sites that do not have early fall frosts, since many of the desired wine grapes ripen late in the

season. Wineries and juice producers are likely to implement more quality standards in the future, and unripe fruit will be difficult to market.

- Quality will need to continue to improve. This is an ongoing situation where the standards will be set higher and higher. Finger Lakes wineries and growers have lagged behind the West Coast growers somewhat in implementing many "canopy management" practices to improve fruit quality. Growers will need to be more concerned with issues such as fruit exposure. High quality wine grapes will need to go far beyond disease-free 20° Brix fruit, flavor development is what you will hear much more about.
- "Diversity" and "value-added" are concepts most growers should think long and hard about. These terms can mean many different things. A mix of varieties and types of grapes and types of markets should add strength to a growers long-term financial position. Even those that intend to grow primarily for the premium wine market may wish to consider some acreage of juice or bulk wine grapes. Few farms are entirely suited to growing *vinifera* varieties, and some acreage in Niagara, for example, can help spread out costs over more acres and also gives some acreage that requires lower inputs. For a grower with mainly bulk wine or juice varieties, planting some premium wine varieties may help you market your traditional ones. For example, if you can offer a winery some Riesling or Cayuga White, they are much more likely to buy your Delaware. "Value-added" can also mean many things. It might just mean finding a premium priced market for your Delaware or Rougeon. It might mean direct marketing of table fruit or unique processed products (the NYS Food Venture Center at the Geneva Experiment Station can help with product development). It can mean growing some organic grapes, of which the market is increasing for. All of these options offer the potential for one important thing, "making more money!"

- In the general sense, perhaps the most important concept is "be open to change." Business as usual will not make it as we enter the 21st century. Things are not returning to the "good old days" when you just loaded up the truck with every last grape you could produce and deliver them to Hammondsport, and then you got your check! Long-term, however, the number of buyers and the diversity of the products that they produce should help to create more stability for growers. Depending too heavily on one processor can put growers in a vulnerable position, as we should know all too well.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank all of you who have supported the program over the past 7 years, and please stop by to say hello to me at Swedish Hill!

UPCOMING MEETINGS

NEW YORK STATE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY 1997 HORTICULTURAL SHOW. January 8-9. Rochester Thruway Marriot. Details and registration information in this newsletter.

12TH ANNUAL MIDWEST REGIONAL GRAPE & WINE CONFERENCE. January 19-21. Marriot's Tan-Tar-A Resort, Lake Ozark, Missouri. You might be surprised that one of the better grape and wine conferences anywhere is held every year in Missouri. If you haven't ever been to this meeting, you might consider it. They bring in excellent speakers from all over the country, the trade show is growing every year, and they have some great wine and food events. The setting in the Lake of the Ozarks is beautiful (yes, even in January) and the meeting is lots of fun. Contact: Missouri Grape and Wine Conference, Missouri Dept. of Agriculture, Market Development Division, Grape & Wine Program, PO Box 630, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102. Phone: (800) 392-WINE.

PESTICIDE TRAINING AND RECERTIFICATION SERIES. January and February (4 different dates at each location). Location options are Penn Yan (dates are 1/23, 1/30, 2/6, 2/13), Romulus (dates are 1/7, 1/14, 1/21, 1/28), and Rochester (dates are 1/24,

1/31, 2/7, 2/14). All classes are 9:30 am - Noon. Training is for those seeking to obtain a certification license (commercial or private) as well as for those seeking recertification. Cost for those needing certification is \$45.00 (includes Core Training Manual and attendance at all 4 classes). Recertification credits offered for each class for those that are already certified. Cost is \$40 for all 4 classes or \$12.00 for each class attended (for those that are taking the courses for recertification credits). Topics include: Pesticide Laws and Registration, Pesticides and the Environment, Pesticide Safety, Pesticide Mixing and Equipment Calibrations. Contact: Russell Welser, Cornell Cooperative Extension, 480 North Main Street, Canandaigua, NY 14424. Phone: (716) 394-4110.

LAKE ERIE GRAPE GROWERS' CONFERENCE. February 14. Westfield High School, Westfield, NY. Recertification credits available. Contact: Lake Erie Regional Grape Program, 412 East Main Street, Fredonia, NY 14063-1450. Phone (716) 672-2191.

48TH ANNUAL FINGER LAKES GRAPE GROWERS' CONVENTION AND TRADE SHOW. March 8. Holiday Inn, Waterloo, NY. Recertification credits available. The move to the Holiday Inn last year seemed to make everyone who attended much more comfortable and the evaluation forms unanimously supported going back to the Holiday Inn. This year, we've moved things around a bit to accommodate more seating, more exhibits and what we think is an even better overall meeting. A complete program and registration information will be mailed in early January (if you subscribe to this newsletter, you will automatically get the mailing). For more information, contact our office at (315) 536-5134.

NORTHEAST WEATHER ASSOCIATION FORMED IN 1996

Tim Weigle

The Northeast Weather Association (NEWA) was officially incorporated during the summer of 1996 as a non-profit organization whose purpose was to provide central collection of

weather information, support of weather instruments, and weather information dispersal to its members.

Members of NEWA accessed weather information in one of two ways during the 1996 growing season, either by fax or by connecting to a computer bulletin board system. Information on infection periods for black rot and powdery mildew, amount of rain and high and low temperatures were updated on a regular basis for distribution to members. NEWA contracted with Weather Track, Inc., a private weather company, for daily agricultural forecasts. This was in response to the National Weather Service eliminating ag weather forecasts due to budget considerations.

One of the strong points of NEWA is its ability to network weather stations, allowing the use of weather information across commodities and expand the area of weather information available to growers reducing the need to extrapolate weather information from a single weather instrument to cover an entire vineyard operation.

NEWA had 43 members in 1996. Membership was across commodities with grape, apple, onion and potato growers participating. Other members were from the various processing industries, consultants, extension personnel and Cornell faculty.

A great deal was accomplished in 1996 and the NEWA board is looking forward to even greater membership during 1997. For more information on NEWA please contact Curt Petzoldt (315) 787-2206, or Tim Weigle (716) 672-6830, or stop by the NEWA booth at the following conferences: NYS Hort Show (January 8 and 9), Finger Lakes Grape Growers' Convention (March 8) and the Lake Erie Regional Grape Growers' Conference (February 14).

1996 HARVEST SUMMARY AND GRAPE PRICES

David Peterson

The 1996 growing season in the Finger Lakes yielded a lot of grapes and variable quality. A late bud break was followed by several weeks

of cool wet weather, resulting in significant early season downy mildew problems and severe mid-summer powdery mildew. Although the severity of the powdery mildew problems were not realized until later in the season, most could be traced to problems in early season spray programs that allowed primary infections to occur, which fueled the problem throughout the year. Mildew problems were quite widespread, but many vineyards also had excellent control. Disease management programs had to be sharp, however, and good spray coverage was critical. The weather improved considerably in the mid and late summer, and prospects for quality were excellent for those vineyards with good disease management programs. Unfortunately, the rains came back with a vengeance for about 3 weeks in mid and late September, causing rot problems in tight-clustered varieties and slowing sugar development in all varieties. By early October the rains stopped and overall, October was quite favorable (although some sites experienced some frost damage in early October). Those sites that survived the early October freeze held their leaves until late October to early November, and quality of many of the late varieties was quite good.

Yields were above average for nearly all varieties and were in some cases excessive. A few varieties were quite spotty, as erratic yields were the story in Aurore, Dechaunac and Delaware. While sugars were generally lower than normal, many winemakers were surprised at how good the flavors were given the low sugars, and acids were not especially high in most blocks. Quality of rot-prone varieties was considerably higher where growers used practices to improve fruit exposure (e.g. leaf pulling) and several growers reported that they derived significant benefits from using Rovral. The effectiveness of Rovral has been questioned by many growers because of resistance concerns, but growers who sprayed a section of their block but not the whole block generally felt that rot problems were much less severe where they used the Rovral.

The market was probably the strongest that growers have seen in years, and grapes of nearly all types were relatively easy to sell. Weather-related short crops in Washington,

1996

Prices (\$/ton) Paid by Processors of Finger Lakes Grapes

	Americana	Anthony Road	Bully Hill	Canandaigua	Chateau LaFayette	Dr. Frank	Eagle Crest	Fox Run	Fulkerson	Glenora	Hazlett	Hunt Country	King Ferry	Lakeshore	Lakewood	Lucas	Royal	Swedish Hill	Widmer
NATIVE																			
Catawba	265		320	220	300		250		275		250			350	340		240	275	225
Concord	265		260	220			275		275						310		250	275	230
Concord hand harvested															375				
Delaware			320	200			300		275						400		225	300	200
Delaware hand harvested															500				
Diamond			320				300		275									300	
Dutchess				200					300										
Elvira			260	220													240		225
Golden Muscat																		300	
Isabella			320																
Ives	280		320		300														275
Niagara	300		320	180	300		250		275		300				310		250		245
HYBRID																			
Aurora		225	380	225			240		275							250	235		225
Baco Noir	385	450	380		400			325	400	375	500	425			420	325	280	400	
Cayuga White	385	450	380		400		400	350	400	375	400	450		400	400	350	325	375	
Chambourcin			390		400														600
Chancellor			390		400				450										
Chelois			390		400				400										
Colobel			390		400				400										
DeChaunac	275	300					300		275							300	300		
Glenora										500									
Himrod									400	500									
Lakemont									300										
Leon Millot									400						400				
Marechal Foch	400		380		400				450					400	400				450
Red hybrid		250		290			250			375	350								350 290
Rosette							300												
Rougeon		410	380		350		300		300		350					285	300	325	
Seyval	375	450	385		400		370	300	400	375	450	400					300		
Traminette									1250										
Ventura																		230	
Vidal Blanc		450	385		400		400		400	375	400								425
Vidal late harvest												500							
Vignoles		575	380		400		400		550		575	450			500				600
Vignoles late harvest												500							
Villard Blanc																			375
Vincent					400		400		400								350	400	
White hybrid		250		235			250			250		300							350 235
VINIFERA																			
Cabernet Franc		1400	780		1300	1400		1300	1450	1500	1450								1450
Cabernet Sauvignon		1400			1400	1400		1300	1450	1200	1450				1600				1450
Chardonnay	900	1000	780	1000	1000	1000			1100	1200	1350	1100	1000	1150	1000				1150 1500
Chardonnay (Premium)																			1250
Chardonnay (Sparkling)																			1150
Gewurztraminer			900			1200		800	1250	1200			1200						
Lemberger								1000											1250
Merlot		1400			1300	1500		1300	1450	1200	1400		1400						1600
Pinot Blanc						1000			1300	1200			1200						
Pinot Gris										1500									1450
Pinot Noir	1250	1400	1400		1000	1200		1100	1350	1300	1450		1200	1400	1450				1250
Sangiovese									1600										
Sauvignon Blanc										1200									
Sereksia						1200													
White Riesling	950	900	900		1000	900		900	1150	1100	1350	1100	1000		1000		900	1100	

Virginia and Ohio strengthened the market, although demand was up locally as well. All white hybrid varieties except Aurore were in short supply, as were the more desirable red hybrids. Demand far exceeded supply of every *vinifera* variety, including Chardonnay which had been in excess the previous several years.

While prices remained the same or edged up slightly for juice and bulk wine grapes, they increased significantly for premium hybrid and *vinifera* varieties. General price ranges (\$/ton) were as follows: premium hybrids \$350-\$500, Riesling \$900-\$1100, Chardonnay \$1000-\$1500, Pinot Noir \$1100-\$1400, and red Bordeaux varieties (Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon) \$1300-\$1600. A complete price listing from all wineries that reported to our office follows.



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Finger Lakes Grape Program

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