



FINGER LAKES VINEYARD NOTES
NEWSLETTER '95 #2 March 13, 1995



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**CHECK BUDS BEFORE PRUNING
TENDER VARIETIES!**

David Peterson

An inquiry in the Question Box at the recent Finger Lakes Grape Growers' Convention asked whether "it was necessary to check for bud injury since we have had such a mild winter." In answering the question at the convention, Dr. Pool indicated that it was always a good idea to do some checking. As some reinforcement to his answer, I thought that I would share some of my experiences this year in the buds that I have checked. Most buds of nearly all varieties grown in the region were far more hardy than the temperatures that were recorded. However, it is important to realize that not all buds achieve the same level of hardiness, and hardiness of buds within a given block, vine or even cane can vary according to such factors as disease incidence (especially powdery mildew), crop load, time of harvest relative to the first frost, sunlight exposure, etc. In addition, some vines had inadequate shoot numbers in 1994 due to bud injury last year, and therefore, grew at an excessive rate resulting in relatively poor cane

maturity. Furthermore, many sucker shoots were left as trunk renewals last year. With little or no crop on these shoots and frequently inadequate shoot numbers on the top of the vine, the growth rate of the sucker shoots was rapid, often resulting in "bullish" canes and poor maturity. I have examined buds in several varieties (including Niagara, Cayuga White, Chardonnay and Merlot) and have found up to about 50% injury on the "bullish" trunk renewal canes. More normal sized canes and the laterals off of "bullish" canes had relatively minor injury. Since some vineyards were killed to the snow line last winter, most or all of the canes to be retained this year may be from sucker shoots. The important lesson here is to be sure to at least check a few buds from the canes that you would normally leave.

MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

David Peterson

Many growers still remember the days when you could be assured of delivering all of their grapes to one processor (2 at the most) for a good price. Today, you don't need me to tell you that things are not the same as they used to

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

be. I know of some growers now selling to as many as 20 different buyers. With consolidation of the larger processors in recent years, the picture continues to change. Some growers have been left without any market for some or all of their grapes, while others may find that prices from the major processors for some varieties are too low to be profitable. Therefore, some growers will have to investigate other markets if they wish to stay in business. Most growers are producers by nature, but are not always marketers. A number of growers have developed lucrative table grape markets for Concord and other varieties through farmers markets, produce stands and selling directly to grocery stores. Going after alternative markets does not necessarily require marketing expertise, but just a more aggressive approach. When talking about the potential for selling to small farm wineries, I have often heard growers say "I've never been contacted by a small winery wanting my grapes." That may be true, but a more aggressive approach might be to send letters to all small wineries and buyers that are known to purchase grapes. Include in the letter varieties that you grow and any special merits that your grapes may have (quality, growing methods, etc.). If you have tried this in the past with no results, try it again! The number of Finger Lakes wineries that purchase grapes continues to grow, as has the number of varieties and the quantities that they purchase. Growers may see this as a *vinifera* only market, but Native American and hybrid varieties are also purchased in increasing quantities. *Finger Lakes Vineyard Notes '94 #12* included a listing of some buyers of Finger Lakes grapes and their posted prices. Significant quantities are also sold to wineries in neighboring states, including Ohio, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and others.

The 46th Annual Finger Lakes Grape Growers' Convention included a panel of "alternative buyers" including Rick Walker of Walker's Fruit Basket, Richard Peterson of Swedish Hill Winery, Andrew Nass of Venture Vineyards, and George Scalf of Blue Mountain Natural Foods, Inc. Each of these buyers indicated continuing or increased interest in purchases of Finger Lakes grapes. A summary of their comments at the meeting follows:

Rick Walker, Farm Manager for Walker's Fruit Basket, indicated that they had purchased grapes from 35 Finger Lakes growers in 1994, which was the most that they had ever purchased here. He added that he hoped to be able to purchase a similar quantity in 1995. Walker's purchases many varieties and see increased needs for several red hybrids including Maréchal Foch, Chancellor, Chelois, Chancellor and especially Chambourcin. Rick indicated that it would be a number of years before the numerous requests from their customers for Chambourcin could be filled.

Richard Peterson, co-owner of Swedish Hill Winery, highlighted the growth of his winery and the plans for continued expansion. Swedish Hill purchases a wide range of Native American hybrid and *vinifera* varieties, and Richard indicated high interest in increased purchases of several varieties, especially Cayuga White, Riesling and several Native American white wine varieties.

Andrew Nass, President of Operations at Venture Vineyards, described their table grape shipping operation. Concord is the primary variety purchased, although smaller quantities of other varieties are also purchased. Venture does some harvesting of other grower's grapes with their own crew, but they prefer that growers pick and deliver their own.

George Scalf, CEO for Blue Mountain Natural Foods, Inc., described his success with selling apple juice from organically grown fruit. He indicated an interest in purchasing Native American grapes from organically farmed vineyards for grape juice, and suggested that the price of certified organically-grown Concord might be about \$350 per ton (with a transition price being paid before the vineyard became certified). For growers wishing to find out more about organic production, see the article on the Organic Grape and Wine Production Symposium that follows.

Although markets for some varieties have continued to deteriorate, others are improving. The premium hybrid market is the strongest that it has been in years and Niagara still appears to be quite strong. Of the hybrids Cayuga White, Vidal blanc, Maréchal Foch and Chambourcin are currently enjoying especially

high demand, although several others have not had an adequate supply. Most *vinifera* varieties continue to command good prices, and some growers have gotten excellent prices for other "niche" varieties. For those growers wishing to stay in the business over the long run, conversion of some acreage to more profitable varieties may be critical to their survival. Before planting any variety, however, I strongly suggest that you have indications from a processor that they are likely to be interested in purchasing the grapes that you plant. As we all know, market conditions are subject to frequent change!

ORGANIC GRAPE AND WINE PRODUCTION SYMPOSIUM

This meeting will be held on March 21-22 in Geneva and will feature the results from a 5 year study of converting 5 acres each of Concord, Elvira and Seyval to organic practices. The program also includes an international slate of speakers representing major companies and universities. Topics include: soils and nutrition, pest management, economics and marketing, producing organic wines, and grower experiences. **Attendees will receive 5 credits for pesticide applicator recertification.**

This topic should be of increased interest to New York growers since there is now a juice processor interested in purchasing organically grown grapes. (See previous article.)

Registration information is available from the Finger Lakes Grape Program Office, or contact Judy Robinson at the Geneva Experiment Station at (315) 787-2238.

WORKER PROTECTION STANDARD MEETING

Since this is the year that the Worker Protection Standard will finally begin to be implemented on farms, the Finger Lakes Grape Program will be sponsoring a meeting in cooperation with Canandaigua Wine Company. The program will be offered on Thursday April 13 in 2 locations. The Taylor Hammondsport farm will host the first meeting at 9:00 a.m., while the second will be at 1:00 p.m. at the old Gold Seal *Vinifera* Vineyard in Valois. Chris Daum

of Helena Chemical Company, will go through the actual worker training procedure (workers needing training will get their cards for attending), Ed Hanbach of DEC will highlight the major points that you will need to know for 1995, and Tim Weigle of Cornell Cooperative Extension will discuss requirements (posting requirements, protective clothing, etc.) for specific chemicals used in the grape industry. **Pesticide applicator recertification credits will be available.**

To get to the Taylor Hammondsport farm, go through Hammondsport on Route 54A going north for approximately 0.2 miles past the Hammondsport Square. Bear left at the sign for Keuka Lake Wineries (Middle Road). Go 1.9 miles and there will be a large white building on the left surrounded by vineyards. Meet at the white building.

The old Gold Seal *Vinifera* Vineyard is located on Route 414 (just north of the old railroad overpass and a bed and breakfast inn) roughly 1 mile or so north of the town of Valois. Meet at the shop building located on the west side of the road.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

March 21-22. **ORGANIC GRAPE AND WINE PRODUCTION:** 3rd Nelson J. Shaulis Viticulture Symposium. NYS Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, NY. Contact: Judy Robinson, Dept. Of Horticulture, NYS Agric. Expt. Station, Geneva, NY 14456. (315) 787-2238 Fax: (315) 787-2216.

March 22-23. **NYS WINE INDUSTRY WORKSHOP.** NYS Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, NY. Contact: Thomas Henick-Kling, Dept. of Food Science and Tech., NYS Agric. Expt. Station, Geneva, NY 14456. (315) 787-2277 Fax: (315) 787-2397.

April 13. **WORKER PROTECTION STANDARD MEETING.** Taylor Hammondsport Farm or Gold Seal *Vinifera* Vineyards, Valois. (Details in this newsletter).

July 19-20. **"ALTERNATIVE WINEGRAPE VARIETIES" SYMPOSIUM** (Features Viognier, Sangiovese, Chardonnay, Norton and other "alternative" varieties). In conjunction

with the American Society for Enology and Viticulture Annual Meeting on July 21-22. Omni Hotel, Charlottesville, Virginia. Contact: Dr. Tony Wolf, Virginia Tech, 695 Laurel Grove Road, Winchester, VA 22602 Tel: (703) 869-2560, or Dr. Don Splittstoesser, Dept. of Food Science and Technology, NYSAES, Geneva, NY 14456-0462.



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