

## Texas Wine Industry Update

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The first grapes utilized for wine production were cultivated by the Franciscan missionaries who traveled from Mexico into the Lone Star State in order to establish missions and expand the Spanish empire during the early 1600s. Later, German and Italian immigrants established vineyards in both the Hill Country and West Texas, however, these European cultivars soon succumbed to a myriad of diseases. Through research efforts, led by the Texas A&M System and others in the wine industry, table and wine grapes of *V. vinifera* origin, French American hybrids, and other natives were all under the scientific eye of experimentation. It was in our state that T.V. Munson proclaimed he had found his grape paradise, noting the abundance of native grapes, thirteen to be exact. After prohibition the industry remained stagnant, a resurgence in growth of the industry did not occur until the 1970s. Fast forwarding from our revitalized birth in the 70s to today much has been learned regarding viticulture and enology. The wine industry in Texas has grown exponentially since our humble beginnings, we are currently a \$2.7 billion dollar industry and employ over 12,758 Texans full-time. There are 408 bonded wineries across the state with over 1.8 million cases produced annually. Surveys indicate there are over 400 vineyards with a collective acreage totaling 4,500. Wines are produced in every style ranging from still to sparkling to fortified with cultivars of both European and native origin. Grapes are grown in every corner of the state with eight AVA's established. 80% of all vineyard acreage is under cultivation in Terry County located in the High Plains. Wineries too are spread out across the state and vary in production size. The most popular wine destination in the state is found in the Hill Country, this geographical area has been deemed the second most popular wine destination behind that of Napa/Sonoma.

Although our industry is growing at a healthy rate we are not without challenge. This was evident with the failures of vineyards established by the early waves of European immigrants. Pierce's disease (PD) is a major limiting factor in variety selection in the Gulf Coast and East Texas. Black Spanish and Blanc du Bois hybrids are the predominant varieties grown in high PD pressure regions. North Texas and the Hill Country are at moderate to high risk, while vineyards in the High Plains are at low risk for PD. The PD tolerant *vinifera* crosses being evaluated by Dr. Andy Walker of UC-Davis are promising and could revitalize the industry where PD is prevalent. Fungal disease is another perennial challenge, disease pressure during the past two seasons has been elevated due to our heavy rains during the growing season. Cotton Root Rot is yet another fungal disease growers on calcareous soils contend with. With the help of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, an emergency 24c label for flutriafol has been granted and is the only chemical control option available.

Furthermore, the industry is experimenting heavily with cultivars that have the potential to be well adapted to the unique macroclimates found across the state. Up and coming varieties showing great promise include Tempranillo, Tannat, Mourvedre, Grenache, Roussanne, Aglianico, Picpoul blanc, and Albarino. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay are still the most heavily planted varieties but both growers and enologists are finding that high quality wines can be consistently produced from these "new" varieties. Consumer acceptance of these lesser known varieties is also steadily increasing. Wine marketing to the

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major metropolitan hubs is also a challenge, to address this issue various professional organizations and wineries have made great strides in developing wine trails and promoting Texas grown wine.

Sourcing sufficient labor, both skilled and unskilled, is another challenge our industry is facing. Although our industry is becoming more established and more universities and colleges are offering viticulture and enology certificates and/or degrees, there remains a severe deficit of labor that is limiting the total capacity of many of our vineyards and wineries.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is collaborating with other institutions of higher learning as well as with our professional lobbying group, the Texas Wine Grape Growers Association to provide research based information to both growers and wineries alike. This collaboration is not new, however, recent funding through Senate Bill 881 has greatly impacted the ability of Extension to interact and positively affect the wine industry. Since the implementation of SB881 in January of 2016, four new regional viticulture specialists and a state enologist has been hired. Further funding has been granted to Jim Kamas with the Viticulture & Fruit Lab in Fredericksburg. Multiple research projects are occurring across the state and include varietal and rootstock evaluations, phenoxy herbicide incidence and amelioration strategies, canopy management and vinification studies, pre-emergent herbicide efficacy in vineyards, frost abatement practices, and others. Additionally, two high school ISD's have adopted a stand-alone viticulture course developed by Dr. Justin Scheiner from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in order to encourage early participation in the industry.

The various workshops and field days provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service have proved highly beneficial for growers and wine producers across the state. It is with great optimism that the Texas wine industry will continue to adopt best growing and producing practices based off of sound research based research.