

Cover Crops, Education, Wine Auction, Director

Posted by steven.reynolds | January 24, 2008

Seeking Sustainability

“Vineyard managers should consider the entire ecosystem as the context for the sustainable production of quality grapes,” says Extension Viticulturist Mercy Olmstead.

Cover crops are a key aspect of sustainable production, as vineyard soil is valuable and needs protection. In a single growing season, Olmstead writes in a recent publication, wind and water erosion can strip away the upper two and a half inches of soil. This can be crucial in the Pacific Northwest when harvest extends into the fall after rains begin.

A good cover crop can also reduce soil compaction, increase water filtration, encourage good bugs and ward off the bad ones, reduce chemical use, reduce weeds and vine vigor through competition, and improve the organic content of soils.

These are all great reasons to carefully choose a site-appropriate cover crop but, as Olmstead points out, there can be



Extension Viticulturist Mercy Olmstead regards Washington wine-grape growers as "pioneers," and recently told Voice of the Vine, "I love talking to growers!"

negatives as well. Nutrients released by a cover crop might not be in synch with vine uptake, for instance, and populations of vertebrate pests can rise. The change in the vineyard's microclimate could expose vines to increased risk of frost in early spring and late fall, while the cost of a cover crop might be simply prohibitive.

Olmstead weighs the pros and cons of cover crops in a lucid and well-illustrated publication that viticulturists can download for free from WSU Extension Publications. Grab your copy of "Cover Crops as a Floor Management Strategy for Pacific Northwest Vineyards" here: <http://tinyurl.com/yppn54>. Or, for more information, visit Olmstead's Viticulture Extension Web site at: <http://winegrapes.wsu.edu/>.

Growing World-Class Employees

Crafting premium wines requires the collaborative efforts of viticulturists and vintners sensitive to regional conditions. Washington's premium wine industry employs the equivalent of 14,000 full time workers. And it needs more college educated vineyard managers, field personnel, wine makers, and winery managers as it continues to expand.

In 2002, WSU introduced a Viticulture and Enology option within the Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture on the Pullman campus. The curriculum, the first of its kind in the Pacific Northwest, is science-based and hands-on. The interdisciplinary program is offered both on the Pullman campus, and since 2003, at WSU Tri-Cities. Transfer students from community colleges are welcome and articulation agreements with Walla Walla Community College and Yakima Valley Community College facilitate transfers.



Students examine vine morphology with associate professor Kathleen Williams.

To learn more about viticulture and enology education at WSU, please visit: <http://wineducation.wsu.edu/>. Or, hear what viticulture and enology students are saying about their education in this short video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0SbjbBbr1k>.

Washington Wine Gala Set for Saturday

Some 190 people will attend the seventh annual "A Celebration of Washington

Wines” black tie dinner and gala auction this Saturday at the Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery in Woodinville.

Proceeds from the auction will benefit the WSU Viticulture and Enology program.

Last year’s auction grossed \$235,000 with proceeds dedicated to establishing an endowed chair for the V & E program. An international search is already underway to fill the position.

To those of you planning to attend this year’s auction, CAHNRS Dean Dan Bernardo offers this advice: “Bid early and bid often.”

Thanks for your support.



Are you the next director of WSU's viticulture and enology program? Learn more about the position by visiting: <http://wine.wsu.edu/>.

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