

Hands On, Wine Auction, Maritime Viticulture

Posted by [steven.reynolds](#) | March 6, 2008

Vit and Enology Students Get Hands Dirty

While WSU offers an excellent science-based education to students of viticulture and enology, additional opportunities for practical experience are sprouting at Washington State University's new Teaching Vineyard, located on the Tri-Cities campus. On Thursday, February 28, WSU Assistant Professor Bhaskar Bondada, graduate student James St. Clair, and undergraduate Jason Stout gathered at the new vineyard to lay out a plot for planting. "The purpose of having the vineyard on site," said Bondada, "is to involve students so they have a clear understanding of the concepts that they learn in the classroom. They get a lot of theoretical knowledge, so with the vineyard on site, they can put that theoretical knowledge into practice."

Bondada began the first phase of the vineyard in 2007 with plantings of Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, and Riesling. With the addition of twelve new rows, the size of the vineyard doubles to approximately half an acre.

"Site selection and layout are very important," Bondada explained. Before the first planting, the soil was tested for proper nutrients and drainage. "Vines don't like wet feet," Bondada said, as he pointed out that vineyards typically feature a north-south orientation, exposing the vine to the maximum available sunlight through the course of the day. The students helped

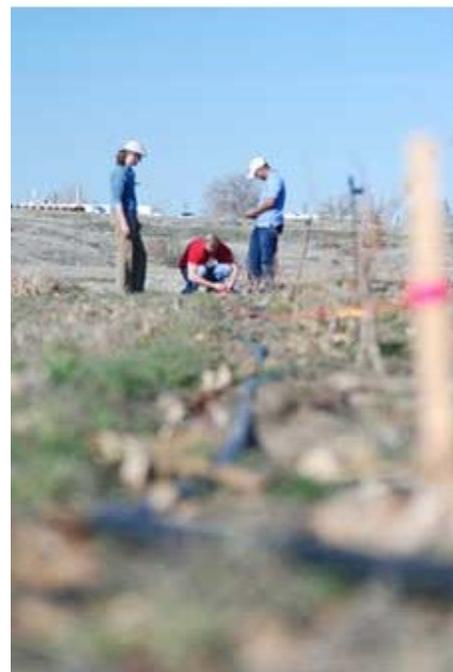
measure the proper spacing for new rows and mark the locations for the new vines. Graduate student St. Clair originally was employed as a fisheries biologist, but decided to go back to school when he noticed the growth of the Washington wine industry and its better chances for career advancement. He values face time with professors and the opportunity to meet professionals already active in the wine grape industry. Undergraduate Stout transferred from Central Washington University. While working as a catering cook there, he became curious about wine and food pairings, an interest that eventually led him to WSU.

The day after the trio laid out the vineyard, Bondada returned with more faculty and staff, five students, and Sue Clark, interim vice chancellor for academic affairs at WSU Tri-Cities. They dug holes in the morning and planted the vines in the afternoon. Jeff Gordon of the Columbia Valley's Gordon Brothers Family Vineyards also pitched in. Gordon is a WSU graduate who lends his welcomed support to the WSU Viticulture and Enology program, and who was instrumental in establishing the Teaching Vineyard in 2007. Vicky Carwein, Chancellor of the Tri-Cities campus, also stopped by to review the progress.

What other hands-on opportunities await WSU V&E students? They will gain valuable experience this year by training the 2007 vines on a new trellis system. In three or four years, when the vines begin to produce wine-quality grapes, students will use the grapes in winemaking labs. Currently, grapes are harvested for the lab from vineyards in Prosser.

"These days," Bondada said, "the students prefer a hands-on experience."

For background information on Bhaskar Bondada, see <http://winegrapes.wsu.edu/bondada.html>.



Undergraduate Jason Stout and graduate student James St. Clair (bottom; left to right) learn the ropes of vineyard site selection and layout from assistant professor Bhaskar Bondada at the new Demonstration Vineyard on the WSU Tri-Cities campus.

-Robert Hoffmann

Wine Auction Tops \$235,000 for WSU Program for Second Time

For the second year, the gala “A Celebration of Washington Wines” auction and dinner has brought in a total of \$235,000 to benefit the Washington State University Viticulture and Enology Program. Nearly 200 people attended the seventh annual gala held Jan. 26 at the Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery in Woodinville, Wash.

Over its seven-year history, the annual event has grossed more than \$1 million to benefit the WSU program that trains aspiring wine makers and grape growers through certificate programs and a four-year horticulture degree.

“This year’s proceeds will continue to build the endowment fund for the world-renowned chair in viticulture and enology that we are currently recruiting,” said Dan Bernardo, dean of the WSU College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences. “Thanks to both those who attended and those who donated to the auction for helping WSU to create a ‘perfect pairing’ of a world-class viticulture and enology program in partnership with Washington’s world-class wine industry.”



Bidding was thirsty work at the 2008 Celebration of Washington Wines.

Research, Networking Vital for Maritime Washington Grape Growers

When it comes to growing wine grapes in Washington, the hot, dry Eastern region of the state is already world famous. Over the last few years, though, several farms in maritime Western Washington have begun to establish their roots in the industry.

“Five years ago there were probably only 80 acres of vineyards, but it has boomed since then,” said Gary Moulton, senior scientific assistant at Washington State University’s Northwestern



A vineyard near Puget Sound in maritime Washington state.

Washington Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon. “Today I estimate there are about 250 acres, mostly of small farmers with 10-acre or less in size.”

With the majority of vineyards being smaller farms, the industry sees an increase of first-time farmers or those with little experience growing grapes in the cool, maritime climate. Many new farmers don’t know what will grow best under these conditions, said Moulton, which contrast so sharply to those east of the Cascades. New growers need to do their homework, he emphasized.

“People need to become educated on what they will be dealing with before they start. We recommend growers to take soil tests and we can then make grape recommendations based on their soil,” said Moulton. “People need to do their research and find out what will grow best in their mesoclimate before they plant and spend money on something that won’t work.”

Using other local resources as references is also helpful in determining what types of grapes will grow. These resources range from bulletins like “EB 2001 Growing Wine Grapes in Maritime Western Washington” by Gary Moulton and Jacqueline King, to associations like the Northwest Business Center, the Western Washington Horticulture Association, the Wine Advisory Board, Puget Sound Wine Growers, and seminars conducted by WSU Extension educators and other experts.

“With so many new people coming into the industry, it is important people are networked, so the industry is linked together,” said Moulton.

Moulton isn’t the only person in the industry that emphasizes the importance of small farm networking. In the “Expect Perfect Pairings” video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cloA2_LlhTQ), other wine industry professionals stress how everyone in the industry cooperates for success.

In the next four years, the Western Washington region has the potential to become a tourist destination for wine lovers attracted by the region’s beauty and premium wines. If people work together, do their research, and remember what they started for, they could be successful, said Moulton.

–Desiree Kiliz, Marketing and News Services Intern

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