

Grapegrowing Comes to North Dakota

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Grapegrowing continues to advance north. In February, I gave a talk to 40 enthusiastic prospective grapegrowers at the North Dakota State University Experiment Station in Carrington. There was a "ground storm" going that day around Carrington.....snow blowing in a 30 mph wind created white-out conditions over the farm fields. Wind chills around -30F. Swarms of "snow snakes" blowing across the highway. Other than that, it was a nice sunny day. Certainly nothing that would deter us from straying off the main highway and taking so-called "shortcuts" over the prairies to avoid the rush hour traffic in Jamestown.

Is it crazy to contemplate grapegrowing in this northernmost Great Plains state with even colder winters and shorter growing seasons than Minnesota? North Dakota State University thinks otherwise (and so do we). As prices fall on conventional grain and root crops, farmers are eager to investigate alternative crops like grapes. The High-Value Crops Program at NDSU has a new grant to plant out grape trials near Fargo (southeastern ND), Burlington (north central ND), and Williston (far northwestern ND). The investigation is being carried out by Dr. Ron Smith and Dr. Harlene Hatterman-Valenti, NDSU horticulture faculty, and Lisa Duppong, research specialist. They have obtained some of the hardiest grape material from breeding programs in Minnesota to set out in the three locations. NDSU's trials will include:

Reds

E.S. 12-18-06

E.S. 10-18-75

Frontenac

Sabrevois

MN 1200

Hasansky Sladky

D.M. 8521-1

Whites

E.S. 10-18-14

Louise Swenson

Frontenac Gris

MN 1131

E.S. 5-4-71 (Eona x Kay Gray)

Alpenglow (E.S. 2-8-1)

MN 1046 (rootstock)

Table/Juice grapes

Valiant

Sipaska

E.S. 9-2-74

Somerset Seedless

E.S. 3-20-33

King of the North

Some other exciting developments are going on in North Dakota. Jeff Peterson has opened Pointe of View Winery in Burlington, near Minot in north central North Dakota. Jeff is making mostly fruit wines right now, but is planting grapes and plans to add grape wines to his venue. In the eastern part of the state, Maple River Winery has opened in Cassleton, with plans to buy grapes from the newly established Red Trail Vineyard near Buffalo. Rod Ballinger is putting in a new planting of Frontenac and Sabrevois on a favorable site south of Fargo and will soon open a winery making both grape and fruit wines. Presque Isle Winecellars, one of the largest vendors of winery supplies in North America, has

opened a Midwest distribution center in Fargo, ND. Within a year or two, they also will open a winery in Fargo.

These developments remind us that North Dakota is not all flat! It is crisscrossed by rivers and the rivers have created many favorable vineyard sites along their banks. Plant these good sites with carefully selected super-hardy varieties and there is a good possibility of viticulture here. Variety selection will be critical. This is truly a place where cynicism about hardiness claims will be the norm. Grafted culture may be required, using rootstocks that can withstand summer drought and snowless winters. But none of this is impossible. In fact, it is very doable. That's the message of both conservatism and optimism that I delivered to this group of future grape growers in Carrington.

Good luck NDSU! And welcome to the northern viticulture family!

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