

## GREEN AND GROWING

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### **Wine Grape Farming in Colorado High Plains**

Northeast Colorado residents sometimes ask about growing wine grapes or developing a winery. I attended an Enology workshop this past Saturday. Enology is the study of making wine, and is the companion science to viticulture, the study of grapes. The good news is that gardeners and farmers in the High Plains can grow wine grape varieties suitable for making good quality wine. Success is dependent upon the growing of the right variety, planting in a favorable landscape site, and careful planning and research on developing a winery.

Dr. Paul Read, University of Nebraska Enologist, spoke regarding his long term research on wine grapes in Nebraska. He claims that this research is applicable to people living in Colorado's Front Range and High Plains regions. The adapted grapes for this region are primarily hybrids of European and American grape species.

Currently, Nebraska has several commercial wine grape producers and wineries located in western counties. Ellen Burdick of Lewellen, Nebraska is one of these. Ellen talked about her farm's (17 Ranch) vineyards and winery at the Enology Workshop. She also brought several sample wines for tasting. My assessment is that these wines would be a good complement to any meal, be it daily fare or one prepared for special occasions.

Paul Read says that grapes do best when grown on a hill-slope, allowing cold air drainage away from the vineyard. East facing slopes are probably the best including northeast and southeast aspects. Grapes develop extensive root systems and do best in deep soils. Studies have shown that the roots can extend 24 feet out from the grapevine crown and as much as 33.5 down. Soils don't need to be rich for grape production.

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Stephen Menke, Colorado State University's Enologist, says that those interested in producing grapes or starting a winery should do their homework in order to build a profitable business. The reality of Colorado's wine industry is that few of its wineries currently run a profit, primarily due to isolated locations and flawed marketing plans. Most are supported through outside investments and Agri-tourism.

Stephen Menke and Paul Read both agree that the real profits are in the wine side of the business and not in growing grapes for resale. There is much more value in the finished product than in the harvested grapes. Most commonly, profitable farm wineries do both. Colorado wineries can use grapes grown on their own farm and those purchased from other Colorado or out of State wine grape producers. To be labeled as a Colorado wine, however, it must contain at least 75% of Colorado grown grapes.

Stephen Menke has written a basic publication on how to start up a winery or winery & vineyard operation.

Please contact me, Bruce Bosley, about vineyards or winery information or contact information for this past weekend's Enology Workshop speakers at 522-3200, extension 285 in Sterling or 542-3540 in Fort Morgan.

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