

Washington

Wine grape crop sets record

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Washington state's wine grape harvest set a record for the third straight year with 227,000 tons in 2014.

That's up 8 percent from 2013 and was welcome news released by the National Agricultural Statistics Service on the eve of the industry's annual meeting at Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick.

The Feb. 10-13 meeting of the Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers is second only to the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium in California as the largest wine and vineyard gathering in the nation.

Washington has been on an upward trajectory of wine grape production for years but dipped to 142,000 tons in 2011 from 160,000 in 2010 due to a freeze.

The industry expects to continue to grow about 5 percent annually in grape tonnage and wine production, said Vicky Scharlau, executive director of WAWGG.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Drew Schick, cellar hand, rakes wine grapes from bin into crusher during last November's harvest at Icicle Ridge Winery, Peshastin, Wash.. Wine grape and wine production continues increasing in Washington.

"It's driven by premium quality wines at great value, which Washington does in spades," Scharlau said.

The state's largest winery, Chateau Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Woodinville, two years ago projected 5 percent growth annual growth, Scharlau noted, saying the key is keeping grape and wine production relatively in balance with each other.

White varieties of wine

grapes increased 16 percent in production in 2014 while red varieties increased 1 percent, NASS reported. White varieties accounted for 53 percent of production compared with 49 percent in 2013.

The largest variety, White Riesling, also had the most growth, up 26 percent to 50,500 tons. It represents 22 percent of the crop.

Chardonnay is second at

43,800 tons and 19 percent of the crop. Cabernet Sauvignon was third at 42,200 and 19 percent. Merlot was fourth at 36,900 and 16 percent, according to NASS.

Growers received an average of \$1,110 per ton for all varieties in 2014, unchanged from the previous year. Of all the published varieties, Grenache received the highest price per ton at \$1,674. The average Cabernet Sauvignon price increased \$8 per ton from 2013 to \$1,448 and the average Chardonnay price was up \$6 per ton to \$922. Growers received an average of \$799 per ton for White Riesling, \$3 more than in 2013. The average Merlot price per ton decreased \$6 per ton to \$1,180.

Washington is second only to California in wine and wine grape production.

Washington has 350-plus growers, approximately 50,000 wine grape acres and more than 850 wineries producing 12.5 million cases of wine a year. Winery revenue is estimated at \$1 billion annually by the state wine commission.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Sen. Brian Dassel, R-Republic, listens to testimony Feb. 10 in Olympia on legislation he introduced that would require the Washington Department of Ecology to test water before warning livestock producers that they have the potential to pollute water.

Lawmakers move to demand more upfront proof of pollution

Rancher: We're now guilty until proven innocent

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The Washington Department of Ecology strongly opposes legislation that would require it to test water before warning ranchers their cows might be polluting a stream.

The agency wants to prevent, not just react to water pollution, DOE Special Assistant Kelly Susewind told the Senate Agriculture, Water and Rural Economic Development Committee on Tuesday.

"If we see a situation that's going to lead to pollution, we want to act before there's a problem," he said.

The committee took testimony on Senate Bill 5584, which would curb the DOE's longstanding policy of taking action based on the "potential to pollute."

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Brian Dassel, R-Republic, likened the policy to troopers issuing tickets for the "potential to speed."

Dassel's bill would require DOE to conduct tests to show water is being polluted before ordering corrective actions.

"If you like scientific testing, this is a great bill," he said. "If there really is pollution taking place, we want to know about it and fix it."

Livestock producers have long complained about the DOE's wide-ranging authority to enforce water pollution laws and assume there's trouble ahead based on what regulators see.

"We're guilty until we can prove our innocence, by somebody's opinion," Cattle Producers of Washington President Lee Engelhardt said.

In a well-known case, Columbia County rancher

Joe Lemire fought the DOE all the way to the state Supreme Court, ultimately losing an 8-1 decision in 2013. The dissenting justice, Jim Johnson, said the DOE's actions against Lemire were extremely burdensome and ignored his property rights.

Dassel's legislation would revise the ground rules. It faces an uphill climb in the Democratic-controlled House. The issue, however, got an airing in the Republican-controlled Senate agriculture committee.

Stevens County rancher Scott Nielsen said producers would welcome actual proof that they're harming water quality.

"As a rancher, I have no interest in sending pollution down the creek," he said. "If we are, I want to know about it."

The Washington Cattlemen's Association and Washington Farm Bureau also voiced their support for the bill.

The DOE's Susewind said collecting incriminating water samples would require being in the right place at the right time, since pollution may be episodic rather than ongoing.

The state Health Department's shellfish and water protection director, Jerrod Davis, said Dassel's bill would hurt the agency's ability to protect shellfish beds and water quality.

A lobbyist for the Sierra Club and Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, Bruce Wishart, said Dassel's bill would make enforcing water pollution laws more expensive for the state.

DOE last year convened an Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee to talk about how to protect water quality without harming producers. The committee includes representatives from farm and environmental groups. Ranchers told senators that the meetings have yet to resolve differences.

Carlton Complex inspires fire reform bills

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — A House committee Thursday heard about the frustration and anguish of missed opportunities to stop the Carlton Complex from growing last summer into the largest wildland fire in state history.

The lightning-ignited blazes burned 256,108 acres in north-central Washington between July 14 and Aug. 25, destroying 300 homes and killing about 1,000 cattle. One man died of a heart attack defending his home.

Okanogan County Farm Bureau President Jon Wyss choked up as he recalled the fire's growing power. Early on, residents asked permission to extend a fire line from private property onto state land. They waited 5 1/2 hours before being turned down by the Washington Department of Natural Resources, he said.

"Could that line have stopped it? Don't know. But you know what? It would have been a good attempt to try," he said.

Such stories have spawned four bills introduced by Reps. Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda, and Shelly Short, R-Addy.

The bills are intended to give landowners and counties a freer hand to jump on fires breaking out on state land, rather than waiting for DNR to marshal forces.

Kretz said that large wildfires are always followed by assurances from DNR that the agency will learn and improve.

"I've heard it from their predecessors and their predecessors," he said. "I haven't



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Timber is ready to be salvaged from the Carlton Complex Fire, Oct. 16, west of Loop Loop Summit on Highway 20 between Twisp and Malott, Wash., in this file photo. The Washington House is considering four bills intended to give landowners and counties a freer hand to jump on fires breaking out on state land, rather than waiting for DNR to marshal forces.

seen enough progress." House Agriculture and

Natural Resources Committee Chairman Brian Blake, D-Ab-

erden, said after the hearing he wants to combine policy changes that have a chance of passing into a single bill.

Legislation may run into opposition from DNR and the union representing DNR employees. Department and union representatives told the committee they will work on legislation, but did not support the bills Kretz and Short introduced.

Some lawmakers expressed concern that letting landowners take the initiative will result in lawsuits or amateurish actions that make fires worse.

Okanogan County rancher Vic Stokes assured lawmakers that landowners have experience battling blazes.

Washington fines fertilizer maker for air pollution violations

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

An organic fertilizer manufacturer was fined \$32,000 Wednesday for releasing too much pollution into the air and not fixing the problem, according to the Washington Department of Ecology.

Bellevue, Wash.-based Perfect Blend, which produces fertilizer from chicken manure at a plant near Othello in Adams County, failed one air pollution test on April 16, 2013, and two tests Feb. 19, 2014, DOE spokeswoman Brook Beeler said.

The February tests showed the company releasing more than twice the particulate matter its allowed to under a permit issued by DOE, Beeler said.

The company said it will appeal the fine to the state's Pollution Control Hearings Board, but declined further comment.

Beeler said inspectors saw too much pollution coming from the plant in 2013 and issued an order to install equipment to more effectively capture particle pollution. Perfect

Blend subsequently failed two tests that measured particulate matter coming from exhaust stacks, she said.

The fines for the three failed tests and for not com-

plying the order to correct the problem totaled \$32,000.

Beeler said DOE is working with Perfect Blend to bring the company into compliance with its permit.

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