

Willamette Valley named 2016 Wine Region of the Year

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon's Willamette Valley wine producers are on a definite roll. Distinguished awards for individual vintages, investment by some of the industry's biggest names and now this: Wine Enthusiast, one of the industry's bibles, has named the valley its 2016 Wine Region of the Year.

The Willamette Valley was up against heady competition: the Champagne and Provence wine regions of France, Sonoma in California, and the Greek island of Crete.

The magazine cited the valley's rapid evolution, beginning from scratch 50 years

ago when a handful of pioneering winemakers — only one of whom had agricultural experience — began cultivating Pinot noir grapes, a cool-weather varietal notoriously touchy about being ushered into a bottle.

They figured it out. The valley has since become recognized as one of the world's premier Pinot noir regions, and is home to 530 wineries and nearly 20,000 acres of grapes.

The valley grows multiple other varietals as well, and skilled viticulturists have taken up the torch in Southern Oregon, the Columbia River Gorge and Eastern Oregon, all of which are expanding vineyard acreage and producing

well-regarded wines.

Big companies from outside the state have taken notice, most notably Jackson Family Wines of California and Louis Jadot of France, both of which bought Oregon vineyards and set up shop.

"Outside investment has accelerated," Wine Enthusiast said in announcing its 2016 Wine Star award winners, "propelled by the recognition that Willamette Valley Pinor noir can challenge Burgundy (France) in its ability to capture the nuance and power of the grape."

The Willamette Valley earned the award due to the "outstanding quality of its wines and the tectonic shift in wine investments these have

engendered," the magazine said.

Earlier this fall, Wine Enthusiast chose a Pinot gris by Eugene's King Estate Winery as its best value of the year.

In a prepared statement, Oregon Wine Board Chairman David Beck said the state's producers are primarily small- to mid-size farmers, more than half of whom make fewer than 5,000 cases a year.

"This award is the direct reflection of the attention and care given by Oregon's grape-growers and winemakers from vine to bottle," he said.

The magazine's Wine Star award for American Winery of the Year went to Bonterra Organic Vineyards, of Mendocino County, Calif.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Pinot noir grapes fill a tote in this photo from Oregon's 2014 harvest. Wine Enthusiast magazine named the Willamette Valley its 2016 Wine Region of the Year, citing its wine quality and the outside investment it has attracted.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Program specialist Taylor Keeton calculates the falling number for a wheat sample Aug. 9 in the Spokane Valley, Wash., office of the state Department of Agriculture grain inspection service. At right, technician Mike Espinoza washes beakers from the test. A grain company has filed a tort claim alleging that the state didn't follow federal procedures in performing the tests.

Grain company files tort claim against state agency over falling numbers

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

A Wilbur, Wash., grain company claims it was damaged because state grain inspectors violated federal procedure when they adjusted for altitude while testing wheat for falling numbers in Spokane.

Glacier Grains Inc. filed a tort claim Oct. 28 against the Washington Department of Agriculture Grain Inspection Program.

The company claims \$7,869.55 in damages.

Hector Castro, spokesman for WSDA, said the agency has 60 days to respond. He declined to comment further.

Grain elevators use the Hagberg-Perten falling number test to measure starch damage due to sprouting. A low falling number indicates a high level of alpha amylase, an enzyme that degrades starch and diminishes the quality of wheat products. Grain with a falling number below 300 typically receives a discount in the Pacific Northwest. Rain and temperature fluctuations are the primary causes.

"I believe the state department of agriculture is not following the federal procedure for conducting the falling number test," said Benjamin Wyborney, a Spokane attorney representing Glacier Grains. His father and brother, Robert Wyborney and Pete Wyborney, are listed in the claim as president of Glacier Grains.

Discounts for falling number vary depending on the elevator, according to the Washington Grain Commission. Some companies dock a penny per point below 300, so 299 would cause a one-cent discount. Others discount by the quarter, meaning that 299 would be docked the same as 276, 25 cents.

This year's total crop was 157.3 million bushels, according to the commission. Forty-two percent of the samples tested by WSDA had low falling numbers.

Under USDA requirements, offices must adjust for altitude at locations above 2,000 feet. The Spokane office is at roughly 1,920 feet, Wyborney, the lawyer, said.

He believes the office is making the altitude adjust-

ment "arbitrarily."

"I do not believe they have authorization to deviate from the federal procedure," he said.

The Spokane laboratory conducts one-third of the state's falling number tests. Other laboratories are in Colfax and Pasco, Wyborney said.

"If I am correct and the state lab is doing the test wrong, that is causing about a 27-second reduction in the falling number," Wyborney said.

State law requires an administrative claim to be filed with the Office of Risk Management, Wyborney said. After 60 days, if not satisfied with the results of that claim, the company can file a civil complaint, he said. If not satisfied then, it could appeal through the court system.

"I don't know how far it's going to go — that is the typical road map," he said.

The claim is the only one from the last decade an analyst was able to locate pertaining to falling number tests, said Linda Kent, spokeswoman for the Department of Enterprise Services.

NAWG survey reveals issues to resolve in next farm bill

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho — Wheat farmers say the current farm bill doesn't adequately protect them against extended periods of low prices.

That was one of the results of a National Association of Wheat Growers survey shared by legislative director Josh Tonsager during the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

A majority of respondents also said the yield data used to calculate payments is inaccurate. They would prefer yield data used by the USDA Risk Management Agency and crop insurance be used instead of data from the USDA

National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Most farmers who responded had purchased revenue protection crop insurance.

The survey will help the organization identify priorities as discussions of a new farm bill begin next spring.

Farmers have until Dec. 15 to respond to the survey.

NAWG CEO Chandler Goule said the association is going to keep its game plan for the farm bill close to the vest.

"It's very important we keep this confidential," Goule said. "If we come in, put our farm bill principles together and then lay them all down on the table, print them and send them around, we have pretty much wiped out our hand of having anything to leverage."

Some of the policy changes likely in the next farm bill will focus on cotton and dairy farmers. Their insurance programs haven't worked as planned, Goule and Tonsager said.

NAWG wants to establish a Wheat Caucus to meet with congressional leaders and their staffs about industry priorities.

"The idea would be to have a venue in place where we can have champions on the Hill helping us out to discuss our issues," Tonsager said.

"Even some basic educational things, about the different classes of wheat, what they're used for" would help members from non-wheat-producing areas understand the crop, he said.

Regulations, predators top new CPOW president's concerns

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

AIRWAY HEIGHTS, Wash. — Agency overreach is the biggest challenge ranchers face, the new leader of Cattle Producers of Washington says.

Kettle Falls rancher Scott Nielsen was elected president during the group's annual meeting in Airway Heights.

"We have a system to deal with regulations through our representatives, our elected government," Nielsen told the Capital Press. "We're being regulated out of business, and it's not being done through our electeds. Regulation without representation is tyranny, and I think we're experiencing some tyranny."

Nielsen said agencies should work through the legislative process, as ranchers must.

"I think our legislators would be appalled to know how some of those things are," he said. "I think we can get our electeds to put some checks and balances on the regulators. I think we



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Kettle Falls, Wash., rancher Scott Nielsen is the new president of the Cattle Producers of Washington.

can make headway there."

CPOW also reaffirmed its position that predators should not be able to prey on livestock.

"Agencies are responding to social pressures, and (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) should be relying on science-based approaches," Nielsen said. "We're going to hold them accountable to the things they say."

CPOW left the state's wolf advisory group in 2015, calling it "inept and pointless." Nielsen said CPOW can still be involved without a representative on the group.

"That is a classic example of social management," he said. "There's nothing wrong with groups trying to do that, I just don't like agencies using those groups as their steering tool. We should be helping shape opinions and we will."

Nielsen doesn't believe the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal will advance since it's so unpopular politically.

"There isn't a candidate out there right now who supports TPP," he said.

The most hopeful thing on the horizon?

"There's a lot of negative stuff out there," Nielsen said, but he believes the industry is coming together.

"Ranchers are a bunch of rogue guys who go do their own darn thing and they've always been that way," he said. "Those guys are starting to recognize we're getting slaughtered one by one. ... But those of us that are there, they're recognizing we've got to work together to come up with a solution."

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