

People & Places

Climatologist takes over family vineyard and winery

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — Though he's no longer a full-time climatologist, Greg Jones hasn't stopped poring over weather data.

Most of his research is now focused on the 76 acres surrounding Abacela Winery near Roseburg, Ore., giving Jones a small-scale perspective on the global climate phenomena he spent decades studying as an academic.

"It's the joy of doing field work," Jones said. "The day-to-day is the most rewarding."

As a renowned wine climatologist, Jones has long been crunching numbers to determine the climate's effect on vineyards and winemaking.

He most recently worked at Linfield University in McMinnville, Ore., after two decades at Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

Wealth of information

Since taking over operations at Abacela last year, he's been collecting and analyzing temperature, precipitation and soil moisture data to make on-the-ground decisions.

"Here, I get to do all that and actually act on that information," Jones said. "There's a wealth of information to act on."

The winery annually produces about 14,000 cases from 15 grape varieties growing on the property, which is equipped with three weather stations, 24 temperature sensors and 40 soil moisture sensors.

"With all that, you can tell I'm a data geek," he said.

Jones still plans to "dabble" in academic research, focusing on the way rising temperatures are likely to impact various grape-growing regions around the world.

Climate impact nuanced

While climate change studies often deal in the catastrophic effects of increased heat and extreme weather, the implications for viticulture are more nuanced.

"It's getting better in many places but it's getting challenging in other places," he said. "There's a lot of adaptive potential in that



Greg Jones, CEO of Abacela Winery in Roseburg, Ore., is also a wine climatologist who studies the global impacts of climate change on viticulture and winemaking.

framework."

Regions that were once on the "margin" of being able to successfully grow wine grapes, such as Oregon's Willamette Valley, have been able to more consistently produce quality fruit.

While Pinot noir is the valley's staple variety, some grape growers are also trying cultivars traditionally associated with warmer climates, such as Tempranillo, Syrah and Merlot.

"Many people in the Willamette Valley are expanding beyond the cool climate potential," Jones said.

As time goes on, viticulture is likely to expand into new regions — for example, British Columbia in Canada may someday become a wine powerhouse on the order of West Coast states, he said.

"There will be opportunities for many people, clearly," Jones said.

Areas where temperatures are already high or that are struggling with insufficient or unreliable irrigation water, on the other hand, may find it harder to economically produce wine.

Regions commonly associated with specific wine varieties may also run into marketing problems if climbing temperatures force growers to replace them with different cultivars.

"If Burgundy had to grow something other than Pinot, would people recognize it?

Probably not," Jones said.

Reliable data on the timing of plant life cycles show that bud break, flowering and grape maturity are occurring earlier than they did historically, ultimately resulting in higher sugar levels and degraded acids in the fruit.

"The plants have told us the climate has changed," he said.

Grape quality has generally improved in many regions but the effect of rising temperatures changes some key factors, Jones said. More sugar equates to a higher alcohol level, while reduced acid can render wine less "lively" when paired with food.

However, these impacts can be offset by removing alcohol and adding acid, he said. "Wine makers can play with that a little bit."

Family interest

Though Jones took a circuitous route to become a climatologist, his interest in wine was sparked early in life by his father, Earl Jones. As a medical doctor in the San Francisco Bay area, the elder Jones took his young family on field trips to the then-nascent wine regions of Napa and Sonoma.

At one point, they even spoke to a man working on a building who turned out to be the famed winemaker Robert Mondavi, who was constructing his winery.

Initially, though, Jones was more drawn to the restaurant industry than to a career in science as a young man. He worked as a chef in California and Colorado throughout his teens and 20s.

"Becoming a chef, I had to understand wine," he said. "That's where my whole wine connection started."

Due to the late nights and long hours, Jones eventually "burned out" on the restaurant industry and started a golf equipment company. Economic problems in the late 1980s hurt the golf industry, convincing him to go to college at the age of 29.

His original goal was to study hydrology and become a water manager but he realized that there was a demand for climatological research in the wine industry.

His father, who was planning to invest in a winery and vineyard, was regularly peppering Jones with questions that required delving into such data.

After studying the effects of climate on the Bordeaux region of France for his doctorate, Jones graduated from the University of Virginia with a Ph.D. in the mid-1990s — just as his father was developing the Abacela vineyards and winery.

Wine and climate

"The further I got into the data, the more it became apparent the climate was



Western Innovator

GREG JONES

Occupation: CEO of Abacela Winery, wine climatologist

Age: 62

Family: Wife, Liz, and grown twin sons, Adam and Curtis

Hometown: Roseburg, Ore.

Education: Bachelor's degree in environmental science from the University of Virginia in 1993, Ph.D. in environmental science from the University of Virginia in 1998.

changing," he said. "Climate change had to be included in the models for the models to work."

Jones took a job at Southern Oregon University in the late 1990s but it was at an international geological conference in 2003 that his career as a wine climatologist really took off.

He was widely quoted in articles in the mainstream and scientific press about wine and climate change, leading to speaking engagements and research assignments around the globe.

"This is something we all know. We all know wine to some degree," Jones said of the interest in his research. "That's what connected me to people all over the world."

In 2017, Jones was hired by Linfield University to develop its wine education program, which he oversaw until 2021 when he stepped in as Abacela's CEO upon his father's retirement.

Climate change is going to transform the global wine industry, but in a sense, that's nothing new — winemakers have always been modifying and upgrading their processes, he said.

"If you're not adapting, you simply wouldn't be in business," Jones said.

Public Lands Foundation honors Idaho aquifer recharge manager

The Public Lands Foundation has honored Wesley Hipke, recharge program manager for the Idaho Water Resource Board and state Department of Water Resources.

The foundation presented Hipke with a Landscape Stewardship Certificate of Appreciation. He manages the board's Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer recharge program.

He has worked to develop the program since 2015, when the Idaho Legislature began funding development and construction of recharge sites across the plain in the state's eastern and south-central regions.

The state aims to return about 250,000 acre-feet of water to the Lake Erie-sized aquifer each year.

The aquifer was overdrawn by about 200,000 acre-feet annually before the program began, according



Wesley Hipke, recharge program manager for the Idaho Water Resource Board and state Department of Water Resources.

to the department. Causes of its decline over decades included business and residential development and usage, and improved irrigation delivery systems that leaked less.

Hipke, board staff and

and others to secure approvals. They also worked with irrigation districts and canal companies to modify systems as needed.

Building the sites fairly quickly helped recharge volume exceed the annual goal four straight years, the board said in a release issued by the foundation and BLM.

Recharge continues to aid the aquifer even as reduced water supply and drought the last two years pushed volumes below the state's annual target.

The board said department hydrologists documented the return of 1.8 million acre-feet to the aquifer over the program's first five years. Restoring it to sustainable levels will require a long-term strategic effort.

"Watching this program develop from afar, we are impressed with the partnership between Mr. Hipke, the water board and the BLM

for working together to create aquifer-recharge sites across the Eastern Snake Plain to ensure the long-term sustainable health of one of the largest freshwater aquifers in the Western United States," said Mary Jo Rugwell, Public Lands Foundation president. "Everyone in Idaho understands the value of restoring the aquifer to sustainable levels."

"The importance of this effort cannot be overstated for the future of Idaho," said Codie Martin, who nominated Hipke for the award and manages the BLM Shoshone Field Office.

Martin said aquifer health has "tremendous positive implications for the BLM's multiple-use mission and resources including wildlife habitat, ecosystem health and vigor, livestock grazing, outdoor recreation, wildland fire and wild horse herds."

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

THROUGH SUNDAY MAY 1

2022 Wooden Shoe Tulip Festival: Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm, 33814 S. Meridian Road, Woodburn, Ore. Experience the beauty of 40 acres of tulips and over 200 acres of outdoor space and activities this spring. We are again offering tickets online only this year to minimize crowds and allow for more time to enjoy our fields. Hours: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday; 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Sat-

urday-Sunday. Website: <https://bit.ly/36o2wMD>

THROUGH SATURDAY APRIL 9

2022 Idaho FFA State Convention: College of Southern Idaho, 315 Falls Ave., Twin Falls, Idaho. More than 1,400 FFA members from around Idaho will gather for this year's convention. Website: <https://bit.ly/3J2JAB1>

TUESDAY APRIL 12

Southern Idaho Livestock Hall of Fame Induction: 6:30 p.m. Turf Club, 734 Falls Ave. Twin Falls, Idaho. The Southern Idaho Live-

stock Hall of Fame will honor its newest inductees on April 12 at the Turf Club during the organization's 61st annual banquet. Those inductees to be honored this year are: cattle producers Guy and Sherry Colyer of Bruneau, sheep producers Don and Patricia Pickett of Oakley, former Idaho State Brand Inspector Larry Hayhurst of Nampa and dairyman John Reitsma (posthumously) of Jerome. The banquet will open with social time at 6:30 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Tickets for the prime rib dinner are \$30 and can be reserved by calling Eric Bennett at (208) 320-5769.

THURSDAY-SATURDAY APRIL 14-16

Spring Fair: Washington State Fairgrounds, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. Celebrate spring at the fair and all things agriculture. Website: <https://www.thefair.com>

SATURDAY APRIL 16

Oregon Women for Agriculture Auction and Dinner: 5:30 p.m. Linn County Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E. Albany, Ore. Oregon Women for Agriculture is excited to host our annual Auction and Dinner returning in-person this year! Make plans to attend for a fun-filled evening of socializing, sharing delicious food and bidding on an

assortment of high-quality oral and silent auction items. Website: <http://www.owaonline.org/auction>

Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in Roseburg: Douglas County Fairgrounds, 2110 Frear St., Roseburg, Ore. The Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or unused pesticide products. Registration for this event is required by April 1. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov Website: <https://bit.ly/3Adxfp>



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