

GRAPE TALK

The Wisnovsky family: Applegate wine pioneers



BY DEBBIE TOLLEFSON

The themes of this issue of the *Applegater* are community and commerce. In my opinion our wine community is one of the most important and influential industries shaping the future of the Applegate Valley.

To discuss our burgeoning wine community, let's start at the beginning—with the Wisnovsky family.

I met with Mike Wisnovsky, who, with his older brother, Mark, and their mom, Ann, owns Valley View Winery in Ruch. Mike explained how the family ended up with the first post-prohibition winery in the Applegate Valley.

Mike's father Frank was a civil engineer who worked on projects as diverse as the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in

Maryland and BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) in San Francisco, while his family was expanding and he was dreaming about living off the land. While in San Francisco in the 1960s, he took a University of California-Davis extension course on wine making and visited the growing wine regions of Napa and Sonoma counties. He saw that southern Oregon was also at the right latitude to grow grapes, so in the early 1970s he packed up Ann, their four children and the dog, and moved to Ashland. The Wisnovsky family lived in a small travel trailer while searching for a vineyard spot and eventually found 77 acres in the Applegate Valley. In 1972 they planted their first 12 acres of grapes. While the vines were maturing, Frank started a construction business and Ann was the bookkeeper.

In 1976 the first grapes from their vineyard were made into wine by a winery near Portland. In 1978 Valley View had its first Applegate crush and also built their tasting room. Unfortunately, Frank's dream was cut short. He was killed in a construction accident at the age of 44 in 1980. Mike said those early

years were very tough and every penny counted after Frank's death. All the children worked in the vineyard as they were growing up; now Mark and Mike work together keeping their dad's dream alive.

Mike says that those lean years helped shape Valley View's philosophy. They want to make the best wines possible, but they also like to offer wines at a great price. Mike still finds it hard to price a wine above \$20, so he markets Valley View's wines directly, without a distributor. Cutting out the middleman, who would take 30 percent, allows Valley View wines to be priced competitively.

Valley View's "Rogue Red" is a great example of creative marketing. This red blend of seven varietals grown in our valley is currently carried in all of the Costco warehouses in Oregon as well as all the Trader Joe's—without a distributor. Mike and his brother also determined that the carbon footprint to transport wines is less to ship to Asia than it is to truck to California. So currently Rogue Red is stocked in Costcos in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Mike says that the Asian market for wine is growing quickly with no local competition.

The growth of Valley View Winery and its new star, Rogue Red, has increased its need for bulk wines from this area. Mike said that our southern Oregon wine community is producing lots of bulk wines for use all over the state. The bulk wine industry, as I mentioned in one of my earlier columns, is just starting to take off and is creating a market for turning grapes into juice for transport to bulk wine facilities.

Mike and I ended our conversation



Mike Wisnovsky (right) with son Stephen.

talking about the relationship that Valley View has with the community. Mike said if it hadn't been for the local residents buying Valley View wines during the lean times they wouldn't have made it. With the help of their winemaker John Guerrero, who has been with the winery since the early days, Valley View has become an integral part of the Applegate Valley Wine community.

Mike and Mark Wisnovsky are dedicated to giving back to the community that supports them. Both are on a number of charitable boards, their winery hosts numerous community events, and they also donate wine to many worthy local causes.

For more information, visit Valley View Winery at 1000 Upper Applegate Road in Jacksonville or on their website at <http://valleyviewwinery.com>.

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Valley View Winery tasting room in Ruch.

Notes from a Rogue entomologist

Wine grapes: Mealybugs and monocultures

BY RICHARD J. HILTON

I have been in the Rogue Valley for the last 28 harvests and have seen many changes in our local agriculture, but none has been more striking than the increase in wine-grape acreage. The fact that this increase seems to be constantly accelerating is nothing short of remarkable. I guess the old adage about the production of alcoholic beverages being recession-proof may have some truth to it. But the last two years, as the economy appears to be rebounding, we have seen some very large vineyards going in all around the region. Even Naumes Inc. has started to convert some of their hillsides from orchards to vineyards. Del Rio, already one of the largest vineyards in the Rogue Valley, is doubling in size. Last summer's spread in the *New York Times* (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/06/travel/only-hours-from-napa-but-a-world-away.html?smid=tw-nytimes&_r=2) all but christened southern Oregon as the new Napa.

Downside to boom

So what could be the downside of this phenomenal boom? Well, monocultures can serve as perfect breeding grounds for pest problems, both plant diseases and insect pests. It was not long ago that whenever I met with wine grape growers, I would tell them that I would be happy to do more research on insect pests in wine grapes but, first, they needed to get some real pests. Well, be careful what you joke about. With the increase in the total number of acres and average sizes of vineyards, insect pests are on the rise. Until recently, other than western

grape leafhoppers, there were really no consistent insect pests in southern Oregon vineyards. There was a variety of occasional pests (thrips, branch and twig borers, spider mites, cutworms), but nothing truly major. It got to the point where yellowjackets inhabiting the vines at harvest and harassing the pickers was one of the main insect problems in wine grapes.

Mealybug outbreak

But late in 2008, an outbreak of grape mealybug (*Pseudococcus maritimus*) was observed in a single vineyard. The number of infested vineyards grew over the next few years. Grape mealybug is a well-known pest of grapes and pears, and while it was known to be here locally it had never been considered a pest problem of much importance. I had only seen this insect in grapes once before and rarely in pears. The mealybug, which feeds on sap and

exudes sugary "honeydew," can, when the population explodes, get into grape clusters and reduce wine quality. Ants will harvest the honeydew and protect the mealybugs from natural enemies such as parasitic wasps. Mealybugs often hide under bark, and when population densities are low they can be very hard to find. Searching for them requires painstaking (not to mention painful) effort as we are crouched down peeling bark from the trunk of the vine.

New monitoring tool

Luckily, the sex pheromone for the grape mealybug had just become available in 2008, and this allowed us to easily assess population levels as we could use the sex pheromone in sticky traps to catch the flying male mealybugs, which are very small (under one millimeter long). The female mealybugs are much larger (five millimeters) and wingless.

Armed with our new monitoring tool, we were able to sample many vineyards throughout southern Oregon. We found that grape mealybugs were pretty much everywhere we looked but generally at a very low level. We did discover one area in the Bear Creek Valley where the vineyards had consistently higher levels of grape mealybugs and, as

you might have guessed, this is the area with all the infested vineyards. Working with Ian Knight, an AmeriCorps volunteer who was assisting the Nature Conservancy, we mapped the vineyards and found an interesting relationship between the grape mealybug population in a vineyard and the distance of the vineyard from a commercial pear orchard, which showed that all the vineyards far from commercial pear orchards had *low* mealybug populations while all the vineyards with *high* populations were near pear orchards.

Hypotheses

While I have a number of hypotheses as to the exact nature of this relationship, it does seem most likely that the mealybugs causing problems in vineyards originated from nearby pear orchards. The population of mealybugs in pears, also called a biotype, appears to have a faster development time and can complete two generations in a year, while the "normal" type on wine grapes develops more slowly and has only one generation per year, which limits the population growth. Recalling that the female mealybug is flightless, mealybugs moving from pears to grapes were likely aided in transport by birds or people, possibly being moved on equipment.

So just as our regional crop mix has changed over time with a new monoculture supplanting the old, the pest complex changes as well, and now I do have a real vineyard pest on which I can focus my attention. Stay tuned for future developments.

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Grape mealybugs on grape berries.
[http://iv.ucdavis.edu/Viticultural Information/?uid=217&ds=351](http://iv.ucdavis.edu/Viticultural%20Information/?uid=217&ds=351)