

Wine influences Oregon’s economy

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

McMINNVILLE — McMinnville, 1971. When a handful of pioneering farmers bought land on the outskirts of this modest rural town and decided to plant wine grapes, people called them crazy. Wine grapes wouldn’t grow in the Northwest, they said.

Third Street in McMinnville, 2019. People scuttle between high-end boutiques, local businesses and fine dining. Baskets of petunias hang from lamp posts like colorful chandeliers. And on the corner where a JCPenney store once stood, there’s a wine tasting room.

In this growing city where urban and rural worlds intersect, the wine industry has signed its autograph. In 2016 alone, Yamhill County, of which McMinnville is the seat, raked in more than \$15 million in wine-related property taxes.

Michael Rogers, a resident of McMinnville since 1976, has watched the transformation.

“It’s been an incredible change,” he said. “We went from a small Oregon town with a bunch of turkey farms to a classy city of wineries.”

McMinnville is one grape on the vine. Across Oregon, the industry has profoundly impacted the state’s economy and indirectly shaped its demographics and culture.

The industry continues to grow. In 2010, according to the Oregon Vineyard and Winery Report, there were 567 vineyards statewide. By 2017, that number more than doubled to 1,144.

According to Full Glass Research, in 2016, the sum of all economic activity in Oregon related to wine was \$5.6 billion. That means Oregon wine has a statewide economic impact of \$177.89 per second.

It’s not just measured by sales. Bruce Sorte, a retired economist from Oregon State University, said the impact is computed using a multiplier effect.

Imagine throwing a stone into a pond and watching the concentric circles of ripples. The stone is the wine industry. The inner circle represents direct effects — expenditures on wine. The middle circle represents indirect effects, such as payments to suppliers. The outer circle represents income-induced effects, which work like this: a vineyard laborer might spend part of his or her salary buying groceries. Even though the grocery store is not dependent on that one person’s purchase, the sum of many such payments impacts businesses and the overall economy.

The wine industry has ripple effects that impact manufacturing, tourism, small businesses, farmers, city infrastructure and the



A barrel and vines at White Rose Estate

Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

job market.

Cooper, canner and glass bottle maker

Morning sunlight illuminated three figures binding barrels under an awning. Fires crackled.

Rick DeFerrari, master cooper at Oregon Barrel Works, rolled a barrel across his shop and hoisted it over a fire to “toast” its interior — caramelizing the wood sugars to bring out sweetness in the wine.

DeFerrari runs a cooperage with two assistants in McMinnville. They make about 520 barrels a year, selling 50% of them to winemakers.

Oregon’s wine industry fuels many trades. The industry’s influence on manufacturing, however, is often exaggerated, winemakers said.

Oregon has several custom crush facilities, and numerous steel manufacturers are based in the Northwest. Oregon wine label manufacturing had a 2016 value of \$5.4 million, according to Full Glass Research.

Yet most manufacturers are not based in Oregon, or even the U.S.

“We don’t have the expertise, the know-how,” said Eric Baisch, manager of Davison Winery Supplies. “Most products are coming from Europe, where there are generations of knowledge we don’t possess.”

Location matters. Where manufacturing takes place has economic consequences.

Robin Cross, an Oregon State University economist specializing in wine economics, said any time producers further process their goods, they’re increasing the economic impact.

“Value-added goods increase a commodity’s impact on its local region,” said Cross.

Hazelnuts are a good example. Cross said packaged, roasted hazelnuts processed

in-state may have 20 times the economic impact on revenue and labor as raw nuts.

“Wine works like that, too,” said Cross. “The more local the manufacturing, the bigger the local impact. It’s about how close producers keep suppliers.”

Farms and small businesses

Moe Momtazi, owner of Maysara Winery and Momtazi Vineyard in the green hills of McMinnville, has seen first-hand how food, wine and small businesses intertwine.

In July, Momtazi said, a couple from Colorado spent over \$500,000 on their wedding at his vineyard — supporting the local catering, bridal and floral industries.

“Wine also brings people to the area who care about healthy food,” said Momtazi. He spoke with a deep Persian accent, leaning on his vowels and letting his R’s roll off his tongue. “That has ripple effects for restaurants and natural farms.”

He gestured to a spread in his winery — tart quince jam, crackers, sliced meats and strong cheeses. The air was thick with the heady scent of wine.

Momtazi also represents the international spirit of the industry. In 1982, he and his wife, then eight months pregnant, fled Iran after the hostage crisis, escaping with the help of smugglers. In 1983, they arrived in the U.S., finally planting their roots in Oregon — literally — in 1990.

Momtazi, previously an engineer, designed the vast winery himself. During offseasons, he and his workers labored three years to build the winery using wood and stone from Momtazi’s land.

People behind the purple

That’s where the wine industry has one of its biggest impacts — in Oregon’s labor force.

Brett Miller, Northwest Wine Co.’s mar-

keting director, cruised up the vineyard slope at Hyland Estates on his ATV, past rows of grapes planted in geometric shapes on the hillside like a great green puzzle.

Among the vines, laborers worked under sunhats and long sleeves.

“It’s hard work,” said Miller, who has labored many seasons in vineyards. “Long hours. Wet. Very sticky. But it’s fun.”

Hyland, like most vineyards, employs primarily Latino workers through labor contractors. Most come from Oaxaca, Mexico’s second-poorest state.

Agricultural labor is scarce, and Oregon winemakers say it is their biggest challenge and expense. Vineyards must offer competitive wages. The typical Hyland laborer, said winemaker Bruno Corneaux, makes \$15 hourly.

The wine industry’s impact on labor begins in the field, but it doesn’t end there. According to Full Glass Research, in 2016, the number of wine-related and -induced jobs in Oregon was 29,738. Related wages topped \$1 billion.

To grasp the scope, look how one winery impacts jobs.

Hyland Estates employs about 30 vineyard workers and 45 winery and cellar workers, most year-round and full-time. Around harvest time, Hyland contracts 50 seasonal laborers. That’s 125 total annual workers.

Sorte, the Oregon State economist, uses IMPLAN, a computer model, to generate economic estimates. Sorte said the wine industry’s multiplier for employment is 2.75. That means for every one job created within the wine industry, one other related job like manufacturing is created and three-quarters of a job is created through an induced effect, such as a restaurant job. If you multiply 125 workers by 2.75, you get 344. That means Hyland Estates alone creates almost 344 jobs.

Not just a drop in the barrel

Oregon’s growing wine industry constitutes a tiny fraction of the international wine supply.

Prior to the 1970s, Oregon’s climate was too cold to grow most winegrapes. “Climate change has made Oregon suitable to growing grapes,” said Gregory Jones, director of the Evenstad Center for Wine Education at Linfield College in McMinnville and part of the family-run Abacela Winery in Roseburg. “Pinot noir has a narrow climate niche. We’re in the sweet spot right now, but if we get a few degrees hotter, that may change.”

Because Oregon’s wine industry is comparatively young, its share of the national market is 1%, dwarfed by wine-producing behemoths such as California.



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