

Crop Production

Goal: 10,000 winegrape acres

MICHIGAN'S 45 commercial wineries in the state are popular tourist destinations that draw upward of 700,000 visitors a year, and wine production and winery tourism contribute more than \$100 million to the state's economy. Michigan wine sales are growing an average of 9% per year, and the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council has a goal to increase winegrape acreage in the state to 10,000 acres by 2024. About 1,500 acres are now

Key Points

- Goal set to increase Michigan winegrape acreage to 10,000 acres by 2024.
- Study identifies what successful vineyards have in common.
- Extension bulletin on starting a vineyard is available for \$5.50.

devoted to winegrapes in Michigan. "Demand for Michigan wines is exceeding supply, but industry growth is

limited by a slow growth in acreage," explains Linda Jones, executive director of the council. "If we could expand the industry to reach its potential, we could more actively promote the high quality of Michigan wines beyond our state's borders. We know how to make good wine, so our goal now is to increase production capacity and efficiency."

In support of this objective, the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council and Project GREEN matched



research dollars to identify what successful vineyards have in common. (Project GREEN stands for Generating Research and Extension to meet Economic and Environmental Needs and is a plant agriculture initiative at Michigan State University.)

Lake, geography foster growth

"There are great places to grow winegrapes in Michigan, but we wanted to identify specific landscapes and factors that contribute to making a good vineyard site," says Tracy Aichele, a specialist in spatial biosystems simulation in the MSU Department of Geography.

For her research project, Aichele visited established vineyards in Leelanau and Berrien counties. She measured the physical characteristics of existing vineyards and compared these to mapped data.

Aichele then analyzed the characteristics statistically to identify the most discriminating factors, which were then used to identify similar sites in Van Buren and Berrien counties that could potentially be good vineyards.

"Despite the distance between the counties and the different geological backgrounds, the vineyards that we surveyed actually had a lot in common with one another," Aichele says.

Gathering topographic data

For example, heat accumulation and disease management are important to grapes in northern areas, Aichele says.

"We can maximize sun exposure by planting vineyards on south-facing slopes, and we found this in practice in our surveys," Aichele explains. "We also know frost protection is a challenge, and local topography is crucial in determining local cold airflow. We were able to measure this with topographic data. Now we have some statistical measurements of these characteristics that can potentially be applied to other areas of the state with similar climate conditions."

Jones says that Aichele's work helped confirm the important parameters indicating an area's suitability for growing winegrapes.

Thinking of starting a vineyard?

Anyone interested in starting a vineyard is encouraged to read Tom Zabadal's Extension bulletin on site selection, available for \$5.50 online at www.emdc.msue.msu.edu.


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