Telephone survey demonstrates impact of viticulture program

**AT A GLANCE**
Getting viticulture information to landowners in the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA helps landowners, the local wine industry and the economy.

**The Situation**
The designation of the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA (American Viticulture Area) in 2016 greatly expanded the interest and marketability of wine grapes in the Clearwater and Snake River valleys of north-central Idaho and south-eastern Washington. The AVA designation has created new economic development opportunities and land use alternatives for the region.

However, establishing a vineyard is an expensive endeavor, and the extensive labor and attention required for successful viticulture might not be suitable for all landowners. Further, local site conditions can make viticulture unsuitable for some landowners, even if their property is located within the AVA.

Landowners need information on how to assess their land’s (and their) potential for successful viticulture production, before they invest considerable capital in such a venture. It is also in the interest of the growing wine industry in the area that quality grapes be produced within the AVA to gain greater recognition for the AVA's wines. Having wine grapes grown on marginal sites could detract from this quality and threaten the reputation of the AVA.

**Our Response**
To help landowners make an informed decision on whether viticulture is a viable alternative for them, UI Extension in collaboration with Colter’s Creek and Clearwater County Economic Development sponsored an on-site workshop and vineyard tour at the Colter’s Creek vineyard and winery near Juliaetta, Idaho in both 2017 and 2018. The program was called Evaluating Your Land’s (and Your) Suitability for Viticulture. Melissa Sanborn, co-owner of Colter’s Creek and a member of the Idaho Wine Commission, gave a presentation on the Idaho wine industry and the most important factors landowners should consider before going into the viticulture business. This presentation was followed by Melissa and her husband Mike Pear-
son taking attendees on a tour of their vineyard which included presentations on the methods for producing quality wine grapes.

Program Outcomes

The response to both years’ events was outstanding. In 2017 the attendance limit was quickly met resulting in having to turn away about 20 landowners who wanted to attend. Colter’s Creek made accommodation to handle more attendees in 2018, when 40 landowners registered for the event. A total of 19 landowners, representing 1,406 acres of land, attended the program in 2017, and 33 attended in 2018, representing 5,313 acres. In-class program evaluations indicated a 104 percent increase in knowledge of viticulture in 2017 and a 117 percent increase in 2018, with 100 percent and 96 percent, respectively, reporting that the program lived up to their expectations.

To get an idea of whether attendees actually used the information in deciding on whether to go forward with a viticulture enterprise on their property, a follow-up telephone survey was conducted in the fall of 2018 of both 2017 and 2018 program attendees.

Of attendees of the 2017 program that were contacted (37 percent), 71 percent indicated that the viticulture program influenced their decision on whether or not to start a vineyard for wine grape production, with 14 percent of those deciding to move forward with a vineyard and 72 percent deciding not to. Attendees sampled from the 2018 program (55 percent) 83 percent reported that the program influenced their decision, with 11 percent deciding to pursue a vineyard and 78 percent deciding against.

The results for the two years combined (48 percent sampled) reveal that 80 percent of attendees were influenced by the program in deciding whether or not to go forward with viticulture production, with 12 percent deciding to move forward and 76 percent deciding against.

The survey results indicate that the program was successful in influencing the decisions of landowners within the AVA on whether or not viticulture was right for them and their property. Providing information that helps landowners make better decisions regarding investing in viticulture production on their land will lead to better life satisfaction and financial health for landowners as well as fostering quality wine grape production within the AVA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

William Warren, Associate Professor/Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Clearwater County • 208-476-4434 • williamw@uidaho.edu

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