

2006 NC WESTERN WINE CONFERENCE REPORT

BOONE, NC JULY 17, 2006. Did it go off without a hitch? Hardly! As those of you who came that day know, we had absolutely excellent speakers, a good program, and excellent weather (as opposed to last year). However, there are always the little things, mostly to be laid squarely at the foot of your humble Director, who frankly was exceeding his bandwidth that day.

Bulbs burned out, and I was having so much fun I seemed to have forgotten who everybody was and where they were supposed to be. Next time, I'll wear the orange wig and the floppy red shoes to complete the analogy. My apologies!

In my introduction, I reiterated the theme of the conference...academic, industry, and government cooperation. I used as my example New Zealand; in my visit there last February for the International Cool Climate Oenology & Viticulture Symposium, the conference began with the idea that all of the Sauvignon Blanc grapevines in NZ (12,400 acres of them) produced on 2.2 grams of Isobutyl methoxypyrazine, that compound that gives SB its characteristic herbaceous "green tomato" quality that makes it so clean and crisp. NZ has come to prominence in the marketplace because of a concerted, integrated plan to understand and exploit this and other desirable qualities in their grapes.

What is 2.2 grams? About the weight of 3 large paper clips, I would estimate. Now THIS is making the most of not much! This was done because everybody down there is on the "same page" in terms of industry growth and development. It's wonderful to see. How do we do that here? This is what the Conference was and will always be about as long as the Appalachian State Oenology groups holds one.



The Conference

That being said, the conference was split into three parts...the morning session, as always, was dedicated to the marketing/tourism/business side of the wine production equation, and this year we had chosen the wine & food partnership. The restaurant/culinary arts are very important to the future of NC wine industry growth, and we had some excellent people here to discuss their practices. The talks were pithy and to the point...models that had worked for some in partnership with regional winemakers. Charles Hardin came to tell us of the First Annual Blowing Rock Wine Festival. Restaurateurs spoke of their models and gave advice to the assemblage (about 170 people).

We were particularly pleased to announce the participation of Johnson & Wales University in our project for the development of an Oenology Professional Science Master's degree. Appalachian has a unique and quite advantageous position being in the western part of the State to serve a particular niche in the wine industry. Of course education needs to be a part of that (see TAPVO)

As we did last year, we have provided you with mp3 files you can click on to listen to the presentations

After this, we broke for the vendor show, featuring scientific equipment of all types. It was a very nice experience, and gave the winemakers a good review of all the equipment that is out there to help them with their cellar and production quality management. FT-IR, Near-IR, autotitrators, and other instruments were present, and explained their wares in an outstanding and attractive manner. My thanks to all of them who participated, including Yanmar tractors, who had brochures about their new T-80 tractor, a tracked, narrow-gauge tractor excellent for reducing between-row vine spacing. At higher altitudes, where land is and always will be expensive, vineyards will have to take advantage of the additional production/acre. Tools such as the Yanmar will be exceptional for this.

After this, we had lunch, with plenty of wine and good conversation.

In the afternoon session, we heard excellent presentations about the WISELAB, Appalachian State's entry into wine science, as well as terrific lectures from Murli Dharmadhikari of Iowa State, Mark Chien of Penn State, and Sara Spayd of NC State. NC State's new excellent extension enologist, Trevor Phister, also came. Following these perspectives, we had a fine time discussing the feasibility of a Vintner's Quality Alliance, and I am pleased to say that this year, the body of expertise indicated that it was time to begin the work of setting one up. It is far more advantageous to erect a structure to

maintain quality than it is to try to retro-fit one, and all concerned voiced their support for Margo Knight, Executive Director of the NC Wine and Grape Council, to begin conversations about the development.

Afterwards, we adjourned, and our speakers and I went to the Best Cellar in Linville for a fine meal and to finish the day as it began, with talk of isobutyl methoxypyrazines and New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc (it was more of a sensory experiment at that point...)

Thanks to all who came, be sure to access the mp3 files if you would like to hear the presentation again, and we look forward to hearing from you and seeing you next year. At that time, we will branch out a little, and the meeting will “hit the road.” Give us your suggestions, and be ready!

Grant Holder