

Collaboration in China

Grant Holder of the Appalachian Oenology Group recently journeyed to China to pursue collaborative activities in viticulture in difficult areas with colleagues from the Northwest and Southeast of China. In the Northwest, we were repaying the kindness of the visit that we received last March.

As you know, China has more than one million acres of vines in the ground, and some unusual viticultural practices which are necessary due to the difficult environment.

I was received graciously by my hosts, and spent many long hours in the difficult and dangerous job of tasting many fine red wines. I have to say I was surprised by the good quality, and the size of the industry. Production is measured in tons, and in the facilities I visited there are tanks lined up about as far as the eye can see.

Despite the fact that some of these northern climates are very difficult, particularly in the winter, practices have evolved to allow the efficient production of vinifera such as merlot, cabernet sauvignon, and other market-friendly varieties. I think I saw one bottle of white wine the entire two-week visit. The training system is not very labor-friendly (it looks unkempt to western eyes) but this means little when labor is plentiful. The pruning imperatives are the same, with spurs pruned to the same number of buds as is common here. However, pruning takes place in the fall, not the spring.

In the south, the problems are familiar ones; too much rain, too much heat. They have developed some clever solutions to manage this. There is also a significant biotechnology effort involving cloning and transgenic species. This is very interesting, and follows along with our interests in food production in marginal areas. We learned a great deal from our energetic and learned hosts regarding the state of the art. Also, the grapes were big and delicious.

Specific proposals were made regarding collaborations in wine, grapes, and natural products. We think they were good ideas, and have received additional invitations since our return. It looks like we'll be headed back soon.