

Wine Industry Grows

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by Brenda Kleinjan

ANICHE INDUSTRY IS GROWING IN SOUTH DAKOTA and western Minnesota: farm wineries and vineyards.

“Every year we’re adding new wineries,” said Dr. Rhoda Burrows, horticulture extension specialist at South Dakota State University in Brookings, S.D., and a member of the South Dakota Specialty Producers Association.

“It’s always going to be a niche industry. It’s something that’s a labor of love for the growers. You have to be committed to it as a grower. It takes constant monitoring throughout the year to get good quality grapes,” said Burrows.

The love – and passion – of that labor shines in Nancy Schade’s eyes as she talks about Schade Vineyards, which she and her husband, Jim, own and operate west of Volga, S.D., in eastern South Dakota.

“It’s beautiful to watch the vines growing. There’s something very peaceful about being in a vineyard, even though it’s a lot of hard work,” said Schade, who can look over her vineyard from her living room. Schade Vineyards is the third farm winery established in the state.

The Schades, who are members of Sioux Valley Energy in Colman, currently bottle about 6,000 gallons of wine annually – filling more than 30,000 bottles by hand. As a bottle moves through

the process at Schade’s Vineyard, it will be handled six times before it’s through the labeling process.

Burrows said the state’s wine industry and the amount of acres committed to vineyards are growing side by side.

Growers will invest about \$8,000 an acre for infrastructure and the vines, said Burrows, but will wait for three years before the first crop to be harvested.

Burrows said about 45 acres of grapes are grown in the state.

“That’s just the grapes that I’m aware of and I know there’s more out there,” said Burrows.

“We’re figuring once the current 40 acres is in full production, talking about direct and indirect impact to the state’s economy at \$1.25 to \$2 million annually,” said Burrows. In 2004, South Dakota wine production was estimated at \$780,000, a figure that is growing yearly.

“I think South Dakota’s niche is going to be especially with fruit wines. We do well with some grape wines. I think one of our best markets will be tourists coming into the state. We’ll need to offer them something distinctive that they can’t get from California. We have the ability – and the ability to do that well,” said Burrows.

The state’s winemakers apparently are



In Region

capitalizing on that connection as many of the wines the wineries produce have a distinctly South Dakota flavor to their name, among them: Oakwood Red, Turkey Ridge Creek Chardonnay, Pasque, Vermillion Red, Dakota Falls' Splitrock Red, Pheasant Reserve and Deadwood, to name a few.

Burrows said South Dakota's wineries offer a variety of fruit wines, varying from native fruit such as black currants, buffaloberry and wild plums to domesticated crops such as apple, raspberry and rhubarb.

"There's a smattering of different kinds – even a pumpkin wine," said Burrows.

Robert Weyrich, who oversees the dakotaflavor.com program for the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, is also excited about the state's wine industry.

"It's the bottling of our culture and our heritage," said Weyrich, an ag development specialist with the state ag department.

Though the industry is relatively new to the state – state law allowed for the creation of farm wineries in the mid 1990s – winemaking is steeped in family tradition.

Prairie Berry's vinters trace their tradition back to 1876 when Anna Pesa Vojta made wine in the Mobridge area, using barrels from scrub oak to age the wine. Vojta is the great-great-grandma of Prairie Berry's current vintner, Sandi Vojta. Prairie Berry was the state's second farm winery and is located near Hill City. The state's first farm winery, Valiant Vineyards, is located at Vermillion.

As the state looks to diversify its agriculture base and develop value-added opportunities, Weyrich said that the wine industry's model in the state, philosophically, is hugely important.

"My explanation is this is the poster child for value-added agriculture in South Dakota," said Weyrich. "They have basically captured an agricultural product that was free – wild grapes, wild fruit – and they have ascribed employment and economic benefit to that ag resource. They've processed it, put it in a bottle and put a name on it and offered it to the world. And, provided tax revenue to the state coffers in the meantime."

According to Weyrich's figures, 11 farm winery licenses have been issued in the state. Designation as a farm winery allows a producer to make up to 50,000 gallons of wine annually.

In 2005, the state's total wine production was just shy of 30,000 gallons for all the wineries combined.

According to the South Dakota Office of Tourism, South

Left: A glass of Valiant Vineyards' Wild Grape wine sits atop a barrel at the Vermillion winery. Valiant Vineyards was South Dakota's first farm winery. **Inset:** Hill City's Prairie Berry Winery offers a variety of award-winning wines showcasing the state's grapes and other fruits. **Photos By:** South Dakota Department of Tourism

Vineyards & Wineries

Listed below are the South Dakota vineyards/wineries and those located in western Minnesota listed on the respective state's Web page promoting wineries:



Black Hills Winery, Spearfish, S.D.
Dakota Falls Winery, Brandon, S.D.
Prairie Berry Winery, Hill City, S.D.
Schade Vineyards, Volga, S.D.
Strawbale Winery, Renner, S.D.
Sunridge Vineyard, Whitewood, S.D.
Valiant Vineyards, Vermillion, S.D.
Wilde Prairie Winery, Brandon, S.D.
Carlos Creek Winery, Alexandria, Minn.
Fieldstone Vineyards, Morgan, Minn.
Morgan Creek Vineyard, New Ulm, Minn.

For more on South Dakota's vineyards and wineries, visit: [Dakotaflavor.com](http://dakotaflavor.com) or <http://sdgrapes.sdstate.edu>

For more on Minnesota's vineyards and wineries, visit: <http://winegrapes.coafes.umn.edu/Minnesota%20Wineries.html>

Dakota's wineries produce more than 40 varieties of wine.

Research on grape growing is being conducted both at South Dakota State University in Brookings and the University of Minnesota. (The University of Minnesota introduced Frontenac, a red wine variety in 1995. This grape, which has extreme cold hardiness and a high level of disease resistance, is one used by many of the South Dakota wineries.)

And the state's fledgling industry is getting noticed. Prairie Berry boasts numerous awards in wine competitions. Prairie Berry Winery was named maker of the 2005 Best Fruit Wine East of the Rocky Mountains by *Vineyard and Winery Management Magazine*.

Burrows is proud of the state's wineries.

"They've done pretty darn well for themselves considering we haven't been able to give them some of the support that other states have," Burrows said of the state's wineries and vineyards, noting that some surrounding states have full-time people at state ag departments and state universities dedicated to the industry.

Burrows expects continued growth for the state's fledgling wine industry.

"I would guess in another year or two we'll have at least 15 wineries," said Burrows.