

AN INTRODUCTION TO WASHINGTON

of Wineries

100 + in 1999 with a new winery every 18 days on average. At September of 2000, the number of wineries had grown to 158 and just a handful short of the 180 in Napa Valley.

of Acres

20,000

Production

In 2000, production was 88,500 tons, up 25% from the 71,000 record production in 1998.

Major Regions

Ninety percent of Washington's vineyards lie in the huge Columbia Valley appellation, Yakima Valley and Walla Walla appellations, while less than 40 acres grow in the Puget Sound Appellation.

Topography

Washington's vineyards are influenced by two mountain ranges. The Olympic peninsula is the wettest point of the continental States with over 170 inches of rain a year. Once the clouds pass the peninsula, the rainfall drops to 35 inches in Seattle. Next comes the Cascade Mountain range which reduces the rainfall further. As a result, the vineyards in eastern Washington receive less than 12 inches of rain per year –some years as little as 6 – 8". The Columbia River provides vineyards with a moderating effect on temperature extremes as well as providing some water for irrigation.

Climate

Washington's eastern vineyards are in a semi-arid desert. As a result, the climate is continental rather than coastal. With less than 12 inches of rain per year, vineyards must be irrigated. Days are longer (up to 2 hours more sunshine than California) and temperatures are more extreme. Days can be extremely hot while nights can be very cool. This leads to high sugar levels AND high acid levels.

Latitude

At approximately 46 degrees north latitude, the vineyards of Washington State lie on the same latitude as Bordeaux and Burgundy.

Major Grape Varieties

Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Riesling, Semillon, Cabernet Franc and Syrah. Grenache, Lemberger, and Cabernet Franc all make smaller quantities of interesting wines.

Successes

The Merlot in Washington is considered some of the best in the world, with Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Riesling considered some of the best in the world and some of the best values. Syrah is coming on strong. Many other grape varieties, such as Gewurztraminer, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Lemberger have had equal success.

Harvest

The Wahluke slope is generally the first area ripe and picked every year, followed by the Columbia River slope such as Canoe Ridge, then the Tri-Cities and Yakima regions. Even within

these areas, there are differences and the lower Yakima vineyards are picked before the upper Yakima areas.

Note:

We gratefully acknowledge the Washington Wine Commission for providing much of this information.

- The Columbia River flow is twice that of the Nile.
- The Napa Valley viticultural area covers 300,000 acres. The Columbia Valley viticultural area is over ten million acres.
- The Wahluke Slope is a name to remember. It has a bright future; it faces south with a good slope. Hence, it's vineyards are less prone to frost damage in this cold climate.