

**Vision and Summary of
Impact of the Upper Marlboro REC
Research Vineyard for Southern Maryland**
By
Southern Maryland Vineyard Team
December 2002

Introduction

The Southern Maryland Vineyard Team has already achieved significant accomplishment by conducting the research project funded by the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland entitled: “Developing a Coordinated Mechanism to Ease Tobacco Farmers’ Transitions to Alternative Crops.” This has truly been a team effort with the involvement of Southern Maryland County Extension Faculty; Horticultural Specialists and Campus Faculty from the Universities of Maryland and Virginia Tech; Facility Manager and Research Technicians at the Upper Marlboro Research and Education Center; staff from the Maryland Department of Agriculture; and volunteers from the Maryland Grape Growers Association and the Association of Maryland Wineries

Since the planting of the vineyard on April 4, 2001 until now, the project has progressed according to plans. The trellising and cordon establishment is now complete for this 27-variety research vineyard. Valuable information for Southern Maryland’s fledgling wine industry has already been obtained. Variety and clonal variations have been observed for disease resistance, early canopy and cordon development, winter hardiness, and vine survival. Current and future vintners of Southern Maryland have enthusiastically welcomed this information as well as the hands-on demonstration of vineyard establishment process.

Vision

The early successes achieved by this research project are only the first steps in achieving a long-range goal of developing a viable wine grape industry in Southern Maryland. Currently, there are 12 wineries in the State of Maryland, yet, not a single one resides in any of the five Southern Maryland Counties. However, there are three aspiring wineries, and as many in the long range planning stages for Southern Maryland. Several commercial vineyards in Southern Maryland produce grapes to supply wineries, and other small hobbyist winemakers. The Association Maryland Wineries indicates that only 50% of the required grape production is being met by the state grape growers. Since state law requires that a Maryland labeled wine consists of 75% or more of Maryland grown grapes, then the only way more Maryland wine may be produced is through the increase of grapes grown. Maryland wineries are also required by law to purchase grapes grown in Maryland before purchasing out of state. These factors, as well as a major vineyard industry research commitment made by the University of Maryland and partner organizations, have spawned a boom in the Maryland Grape Growers Association’s roster to over 200 growers statewide. Undoubtedly, research, and education are key components for the

successful transition of area farmers into this new venture. The Southern Maryland Vineyard Team would like to continue this vineyard research and demonstration project for another three years. This additional project time would allow the full maturation of the vineyard. Future data gathered would be inclusive of variety performance parameters, and ultimately wine quality and production. Our Southern Maryland vintners will benefit by drawing from this research discovery, and with confidence be enabled to develop a new sector of agribusiness for our region. Through our research efforts wine grape variety and production recommendations will be developed specifically to overcome Southern Maryland's climate challenge of high humidity and warm nights during grape harvest. A wine-processing laboratory will be set-up, and utilized at the research facility to attain high quality wine blends unique to Southern Maryland. This fruit laboratory will also be made available to area vintners for blending trials of their own vineyard product. It is foreseeable that this industry will develop with or without our help; although, we certainly can enhance its profitability and longevity. Recognizable and obtainable goals for the development of a Southern Maryland Wine industry would include:

1. The transition of 7% of former tobacco farmers, or approximately 40 farmers, into vinifera wine grape production on a 5-acre or larger vineyard. This 200-acre commitment in Southern Maryland to wine grape production would rapidly establish a viable wine industry. Within four years, 200 acres of production would equate to 800 tons of vinifera wine grapes produced annually, translating into 533,333 bottles of wine (at 15 pounds of grapes per gallon). If a typical bottle of wine retails for \$10.00, then \$5,333,330 will be realized.
2. The development of vineyard labor pooling, harvest mechanization, and harvest transportation to wineries.
3. The development of 8 private wineries in Southern Maryland each capable of 100 tons of processing, or a single large grower owned "closed" cooperative winery for capturing of the regional value of the product.

Impact

- The following letter addressed to the Southern Maryland Vineyard Team by Mr. William Kirby, written on December 23, 2002, best serves to shed light on the impact of the research vineyard at the University of Maryland Upper Marlboro Research and Education Center:

December 23, 2002

To the Southern Maryland Vineyard Team,

I have had several recent inquiries from the upper part of the Southern Maryland Counties for the "Kirby Primer", which gives suggestions for reading material, grape vine sources, land preparation, and available governmental sources of information to help the person interested in wine grape growing as an alternative agricultural crop. I think the new demonstration wine grape vineyard at Upper Marlboro has generated a lot of this enthusiasm.

The State of Maryland has grape vines planted in the higher, colder area of the State near Hagerstown, the Eastern Shore near Centreville, southern Eastern Shore near Salisbury, but nowhere is there a research or

demonstration wine grape vineyard in the central or southern part of Maryland between Hagerstown and the Chesapeake Bay, except at Upper Marlboro. The Upper Marlboro Ag Farm vineyard has replications of wine grapes, on the same trellis type used by most commercial vineyards in the southern Maryland region, which should be nurtured and observed over a long period of years to indicate which of the many varieties of vines are best suited to the needs of most prospective growers in Southern Maryland. There is no other source of this valuable information applicable to that land and climate. Southern Maryland, with the land use vacuum caused by the discontinuance of part of the tobacco crop, is most certainly the logical place where a future new grape growing industry will develop.

The demonstration vineyard on the old tobacco experimental farm is the perfect example of agricultural extension leadership needed to foster this example of farming in the future. The Upper Marlboro experimental wine grape vineyard is a very valuable asset to the agricultural community.

Best regards, Bill Kirby

- In a conversation on December 27, 2002 with Mr. James Russel, he candidly revealed that the 65% increase in the Maryland Grape Growers membership from 130 to over 200 members, during the past two years, certainly correlates to the University of Maryland's increase in viticulture educational programs and research. Mr. Russel a long-standing membership chairman, and statistician for the Maryland Grape Growers Association, also noted a substantial rise in commercial vineyards in Maryland during this same two-year period. Currently, there are 35 commercial vineyards in the state, a number that represents nearly one-fifth of the state's vineyards. A vineyard is considered commercial when it exceeds a 1-2 acre size, and the predominance of its grape sales are received by a commercial winery. Mr. Russel concluded that many hobbyist vintners have, and continue to expand their vineyards.
- The Southern Maryland Vineyard Team has utilized the research vineyard at Upper Marlboro as an educational tool since its inception to promote the growth of a wine industry as part of the following events:
 - ◆ July 25, 2001 – Introduction to Grapes Twilight.
 - ◆ October 11, 2001 – Maryland Agricultural Commission Vineyard Tour
 - ◆ February 6, 2002 – Southern Maryland Vegetable and Fruit Meeting – Vineyard research presentation to growers.
- The University of Maryland Extension faculty Dr. Joe Fiola, State Fruit Specialist; Mr. Ben Beale, Extension Educator for St. Mary's County; Dr. Herb Reed, Extension Educator for Calvert County; and Mr. David Myers Extension Educator for Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties have worked with the following growers in Southern Maryland and surrounding areas during the past two years to help develop commercial vineyard operations:
 - ◆ Billy Johnson, St. Mary's County
 - ◆ Lindsey Duvall, Duvall Vineyards, Millersville, MD
 - ◆ John Bisson, Annapolis, MD
 - ◆ Maggie and Mark Obrien, Jubilee Farms, Leonardtown, MD (planting 2003)
 - ◆ Christopher Plummer, Queen Anne's County

- ◆ James Raley, Hollywood, MD
 - ◆ John G. Rice, Annapolis, MD
 - ◆ Jennie Schmidt, Queen Anne's County
 - ◆ Patrick Isles, Summerseat Vineyard, Lusby, MD
 - ◆ Steve Purvins, Bustwood, MD
 - ◆ Walter Deshler, Hughesville, MD
 - ◆ Vicki Childs, Friendship, MD
 - ◆ Jim Grube, Leonardtown, MD
 - ◆ Ron Wates, Harness Creek Vineyard, Annapolis, MD
 - ◆ Jim Riggleman, Lothian, MD
 - ◆ Scott Rupard, Shady Side, MD (Planting 2003)
 - ◆ Margaret Amoroso, Deale, MD
 - ◆ Charlie Springer, St. Mary's County
 - ◆ Walter Deschler, St. Mary's County
 - ◆ Steve King, St. Mary's County
 - ◆ William and Susan Johnson, St. Mary's County
 - ◆ Joe Dick, St. Mary's County
 - ◆ Jamie Railey, St. Mary's County
- Dr. Joe Fiola reported that last year the Beginners' Grape Growers Workshop attracted 115 people. Because of current interest we have scheduled another for February 6, 2003. Also in on February 8, 2003 a vineyard-pruning clinic will be held at the Upper Marlboro research vineyard.
 - To introduce new varieties and replicate some of the varieties that have potential for Southern Maryland currently on trial at the Upper Marlboro research vineyard Dr. Fiola is planning to plant a small variety demonstration at Steve Purvins vineyard in Bustwood, MD this spring.
 - Dr. Fiola noted that wines made from grapes from southern MD vineyards continue to show well at wine festivals and fairs. Certainly, a goal is to utilize the Upper Marlboro research vineyard for the next three years to develop unique and outstanding wines for Southern Maryland.
 - The Southern Maryland Vineyard Team has and will continue to publish the Upper Marlboro vineyard research results in state and regional Extension newsletters, Fact Sheets and trade publications to accomplish a region wide impact. Results will be applicable to many other areas of the state, including the Eastern Shore. This project also has a significant number of varieties and proper replication, and coupled with a planned divided canopy management style, and two training systems for each replication will offer production discovery needed on commercial vineyards throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.
 - It should be recognized that the production technology utilized for wine grapes is transferable to other small fruit production. Mr. Mark Spicknall, Facility Manager, Upper Marlboro REC was compelled to impart that a substantial commitment of experiment station funding has been utilized to support projects like the research vineyard. Recently, the farm installed a perimeter deer fence and an expanded trickle irrigation system. The Upper Marlboro Research and Education Center is responding to the regional change of agriculture in Southern Maryland. Southern Maryland has a rich heritage; Dr. Herb Reed noted that Norton an indigenous variety of grapes to Virginia and Southern Maryland region might be utilized to produce a historically significant wine for Southern Maryland. Also the table grape

varieties, and brambles will benefit from the same research technology currently utilized for the vineyard research project.

The Southern Maryland Vineyard Team entrusts this vision and summary of impact of the Upper Marlboro REC research vineyard for Southern Maryland to the Southern Maryland Agricultural Commission and the Tri-County Council Executive Board on December 27, 2002 for their consideration. The Southern Maryland Vineyard Team has requested funding of \$19,130 deemed necessary to continue this project for three more years. Thank you for the consideration afforded our team effort, and we look forward to continuing this project for the well being of our regional farming community.

Southern Maryland Vineyard Team

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Association of Maryland Wineries

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Compiled December 27, 2002
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