

Keys to Success

References and supporting resources referring to the questions in the Enterprise Selection Guide for Viticulture

- **QUESTION 1:** Have you prepared a business plan for your vineyard, including financial budgets?

Grapes require a relatively high up-front investment in vines, trellis material, fencing, and establishment. Per acre cost for establishing one acre of grapes in Maryland ranges between \$6000 and \$12000. Grapes are a perennial crop with an average life expectancy of between 15-20 years. Enterprise budgets for grapes can be found on the University of Maryland Small Fruit website: <http://extension.umd.edu/smallfruit/economics-commercial-grape-production>

You can also view a presentation on the economics of starting a vineyard by Shannon Dill at <http://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/docs/programs/viticulture/%286%29EconomicsVineyardDill.pdf>

- **QUESTION 2:** Do you have well drained productive soils?

Grapes will not tolerate poorly drained soils. One of the first checks to make if considering a vineyard is the soil drainage class of your site. A well-drained site is preferred. Soil type and drainage information can be found online using the USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey. See the publication titled "Land and Setting Up a Farmstead" for more information; <http://extension.umd.edu/newfarmer/program-topics/land-and-setting-farmstead>

Your local Extension Agent can help you evaluate soils and site suitability for vineyards. You may also view a presentation on grape site suitability from Joe Fiola on the University of Maryland Small Fruit website: <http://extension.umd.edu/smallfruit/presentationsworkshops/new-grape-grower-workshop-presentations>

- **QUESTION 3:** Have you tested your soils to ensure you do not have high nematode levels?

Nematodes are small microscopic roundworms which can damage grape vines through direct root feeding and through vectoring diseases. The best and easiest way to control nematodes is through practices employed before the vineyard is planted. Nematode levels should be tested through soil sampling between May and October when the soil is at least 55 degrees F. Instructions for taking nematode samples can be found on the University of Maryland Small Fruit website at:

<https://www.extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/docs/programs/viticulture/Pre-plantRenovationSoilCondNewVineYard.pdf>

- **QUESTION 4:** Do you have a market for your grapes?

The mid-Atlantic region currently has a relatively strong demand for local grapes, due in part to the expanding wine industry and consumer demand for local Maryland wine. However, as with any crop, new growers are advised to visit with potential buyers before planting vines. Wineries can be very picky about what variety of grapes they are willing to buy. Visit the Maryland Grape Growers website <http://www.marylandgrapes.org/> or the Association of Maryland Wineries website <http://www.marylandwine.com/learn-more/Winery-Startup-Info> for contacts of potential buyers.

- **QUESTION 5:** Do you enjoy working in a vineyard, working outside completing hands-on activities, and operating equipment?

While the idea of having a vineyard brings a sense of nostalgia and romance, there is no doubt that productive vineyards require a lot of manual labor and hard work. New growers are encouraged to volunteer at local vineyards for a season before making the commitment to vineyard establishment.

- **QUESTION 6:** Are you willing to spray for diseases and other pests on a regular basis?

The typical vineyard will require between 12-14 applications of crop protection materials each year. While not impossible, it is very difficult to grow grapes organically in the mid-Atlantic region. Diseases are the main pest issues due to the relatively humid, hot climate, and a regular fungicide schedule must be maintained to keep the vines productive. For more information see; <http://extension.umd.edu/smallfruit/grapes/grape-pest-weed-management>

- **QUESTION 7:** Do you have a plan for managing deer and other wildlife (birds, raccoons)?

Deer can cause extensive damage to vineyards. Suburban areas often have very high populations of deer, and vineyards provide a great food source. Fencing (10-12 feet tall) may be required in some areas, or the use of other deterrents. Most vineyards also require bird netting in August and September. For more information on wildlife see:

<http://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/docs/programs/viticulture/BeginnersWildlifemgmt0208.pdf>

- **QUESTION 8:** Do you have water and irrigation potential?

Mature grapes are deep rooted and can tolerate some water stress. Water stress during the establishment years, when roots have not yet developed should be avoided. A simple drip system can be installed for the first 3-4 years. On sandy sites in southern areas, irrigation may be needed 3 out of every 5 years. In addition, clean water will be needed for each spray application (100 gallons per acre).

- **QUESTION 9:** Do you have a good labor source?

Grapes require year round work; including winter pruning, spring shoot selection, spraying, summer leaf pulling and shoot placement, more spraying, and followed by harvest. Harvesting is the most labor intensive exercise. Many vineyards will rely on family and friends during harvest time. A vineyard 3-5 acres in size can be handled using labor from a family of 2 with some extra help during peak seasons. Once the vineyard reaches 10 acres in size, some form of full-time summer help is normally needed.

- **QUESTION 10:** Are you willing to commit to a perennial crop with a 15-20 year lifecycle?

Be sure to think through your decision and be committed to the long-term nature of a perennial crop. Visiting with local vineyards, attending field days and helping out fellow growers can be a good way to develop experience and make sure grape growing is for you.

For more information on grapes, visit the University of Maryland Small Fruit website at:

<http://extension.umd.edu/smallfruit>

OTHER ASSISTANCE

How to Start a Horse Farm Business

<http://voices.yahoo.com/how-start-horse-farm-business-5758592.html>

University of Maryland Extension has an office in your county

<http://extension.umd.edu/locations>

Starting a Farm Enterprise in Maryland: Checklist (FS-946)

http://www.extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/_docs/articles/FS-946%20Starting%20a%20Farm%20Enterprise%20in%20Maryland%20-%20Checklist.pdf

Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts

<http://www.mascd.net/>