



A Nichols Worth of Wine

March 2007

In The Vineyard

It seems as though every media channel, print, video and the internet are all talking “green”. Winemakers around the world are no exception. And while we have since learned that our *almost* President, Al Gore, did not invent the internet, his recent Oscar-winning documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth”, is certainly generating increased discussion of late on this very “heated” subject. Research on climate change and global warming however, has been going on since NASA launched its first weather satellite in 1960 and the first report on how weather changes might affect winegrowing was published in 1983.

Skepticism abounds and even climatologists can’t seem to agree if global warming is in fact “global” citing that the most significant changes in recent warming trends have been greatest between 40 degrees north and 70 degrees north of the equator. Before you go running for your globe, this climatic border includes all of Italy, France, Germany, half of Spain and Portugal and the northern part of the US; uncomfortably close to Napa and Sonoma Valley! According to research, Napa has warmed by some 5 degrees since 1930 which can extend its growing season by weeks as extreme heat basically shuts down vine growth. Some “experts” predict that if this warming trend continues, Napa’s climate will begin to look like California’s central valley, source of mediocre grapes that go into jug wines. A few degrees change in temperature is not something we wine drinkers fret over in our day to day existence, but this trend has scientists and winemakers the world over very concerned.

Wine grapes are hardy and tenacious. Unlike the people who work with and consume them, they thrive on stress. Poor soil, rocky terrain, too much or too little water, (ironically) exposure to carbon dioxide; none of these negatively impact grapes ability to produce outstanding wines. A number of grape varieties however are heat sensitive, within a narrow temperature band. Studies generally endorsed by scientists and winemakers indicate that recent heat spikes in vineyards around the globe could shrink the total area suitable for growing premium wine grapes by as much as 80% over the next century! Interesting though, is that some wine growing regions could actually benefit from a warming trend. Germany, which experiences colder winters and generally cooler summers than its winegrowing neighbors, has enjoyed relatively favorable grape growing weather since 1991. Could cult wines from Canada be far behind?

Vineyard management is and will continue to play the lead role in helping to neutralize the impact of this warming trend. Planting heat-resistant vines, redirecting vine growth away from direct sunlight, cover-cropping between the rows and laying straw in the vineyards to retain moisture are just some of the tactics being studied and employed. For the near term future, my guess is that we are still assured of the availability of quality wine. Beyond that, global warming and its bearing on the wine we drink is an issue consumers, scientists, grape growers and former would-be Presidents all need to pay greater attention to.

Around Town

Choice is something the American consumer thrives on and wine shoppers in Naples continue to benefit as new wine merchants populate our town. The newest entry into the wine market is *Wild Oats*, the organic grocer located in a new shopping center on Airport Pulling Road, just north of Pine Ridge Road.

Generally, I am not a big advocate of buying wine in supermarkets. Wine for most big-box stores is often just one more commodity that competes for attention with the bread, canned vegetables and laundry detergents. The moment you walk through the doors of *Wild Oats* though, you get a sense that is about to change. Navigating through aisle after aisle of incredibly fresh produce, huge displays of artisan cheeses, appetizing take-home entrees and a made-from-scratch soup bar, you reach a beverage center that holds a dizzying selection of 2000 different wines.

As you would expect, *Wild Oats* delivers with its commitment to a healthy lifestyle by offering organic and biodynamic made wines. I counted close to 100 wines in the “*Organic Wine*” section. Frey Vineyards, of Redwood Valley in California, regarded as a leader in the growing organic wine market, is well represented. Frey, along with a number of other wineries on display, offer especially good news for those wine drinkers who suffer from allergies sometimes associated with wine drinking. Many popular varietals are available with no “added or detectable sulfites”, the key component that produces allergic reactions for a small number of wine drinkers. There was even one wine from South Africa labeled as completely “sulfite free”, the first I’ve ever come across with this claim.

In addition to the organic selections, wines from every imaginable region of the world, including Korea and Florida, are on hand. Surprising was the Sake section, with more than a dozen choices. There is great balance in terms of old world and new world wines and red, whites and champagnes, though California seems to lead with reds dominating. A great collection of Pinot Noirs from Oregon are also offered. Pricing is comparable to most wine outlets in the area with a great selection in the \$20 and under category. I learned that all of the wines at “*Wild Oats*” are displayed out front which tells me that they are committed to proper temperature control. None of the wines are sitting on shelves in the back baking in the heat of a warehouse. The store is comfortably “cool”. On my numerous visits to *Wild Oats* since it opened six weeks ago, it was refreshing to see a constant presence of the wine manager out front answering customer questions and tending his inventory. All of the wines have display labels and many offer descriptions and recent ratings.

Wild Oats is more than the best grocer in Naples; it also offers a great selection of wine.

Did you know...

Wine consumption in India is projected to increase 33% annually over the next few years - up from its current rate of one teaspoon per person!