

Strategic Plan: 2020-2025

Indiana Wine Grape Council

Introduction

In April 2013, the Indiana Wine Grape Council approved a 5-year Strategic Plan. At the April 2019 Council meeting a process was approved to prepare an updated Strategic Plan which included a survey of Indiana winery and vineyard operators. The Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff prepared and sent a survey instrument to those on their mailing list in May 2019. The survey results were presented and discussed at the November 2019 Council meeting. The Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff have provided suggestions for potential activities in response to the survey results.

The following is a draft of a Wine Grape Council Strategic Plan for 2020-2025. It contains three overarching goals and specific actions to achieve these goals.

1. Premium Indiana Wines

A strong aspiration of those affiliated with the Indiana wine industry is the production and sale of premium quality wines. Based on the survey results and discussion at the Indiana Wine Grape Council November 2019 meeting, a top priority for Indiana wineries is producing a quality product with strong consumer acceptance and continued recognition at events such as the Indy International Wine Competition and Vintage Indiana. To accomplish this goal of quality Indiana wines, the following actions are recommended.

- a. **Enology Continuing Education and Certificate Programs.** The Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff, with recruiting efforts and support of the Indiana Wine Grape Council, should encourage enology education opportunities. This can be done in several ways that are not mutually exclusive. Several major U.S. universities (e.g., Cornell University, Pennsylvania State University, Texas Tech University, University of California-Davis) already offer professional winemaking certification programs either online or in residence. The Purdue University Wine Grape website should provide links to those highly-ranked winemaking programs and encourage Indiana wineries to enroll their employees. These highly-ranked U.S. university winemaking program offerings are geared to in-depth, multi-month study. Purdue University should also offer one-day training sessions on the Purdue University campus and throughout the state of Indiana on a regular basis to provide basic hands-on winemaking skills and host winemaking discussion groups. Certificates could be offered to validate completion of basic one-day seminars in introductory enology

- and winery operation topics ranging from grape harvest to fermentation to blending to basic laboratory testing to final bottling and labeling. The intent is to motivate those individuals involved in winemaking in Indiana to engage in continuing education programs to expand their winemaking skills. This should result in more premium wines for sale by Indiana wineries and enhance the overall image of the Indiana wine industry. The certificate program is meant to recognize winemaking educational accomplishments and is not a regulatory effort. Just as the Indy International can motivate the making of and recognition of premium wines, enology Extension education programs can help winemakers learn new skills from experts and encourage collegiality among winemakers throughout the Indiana wine industry. Training sessions would be offered based on demand, but generally 2-3 Extension education programs/seminars annually in various locations in Indiana.
- b. **Wine Testing.** The Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff, with assistance from the Indiana Wine Grape Council, should encourage Indiana wineries to submit wine samples to the Enology Laboratory at Purdue University. These tests are currently free and confidential to Indiana wineries. The analytical test would include: pH, titratable acidity, alcohol, free SO₂, etc. The test results can serve as a basis to validate the local winery laboratory tests and enhance Indiana wine quality. Appropriate brochures, website information, *Grape to Glass* newsletter, and recommendations by the Wine Grape Council should be used to promote this wine testing service. Jill Blume will continue to manage wine testing in the Food Science Enology Laboratory.
 - c. **Winemaking Videos.** The Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff already have produced online videos (<https://ag.purdue.edu/foodsci/extension/winegrapeteam/Pages/default.aspx>). They are listed under “Through the Grapevine”. Two-four new winemaking related videos should be added annually. They can complement the certificate Extension enology education programs and should be strongly promoted by the Indiana Wine Grape Council.
 - d. **Other enology educational options.** Dr. Christian Butzke plans to offer a “Hotseat Real Time Top 10 Topics” series. The intent is to respond to frequently asked or emerging enology topics.
 - e. **Enology Quick Reference Card.** A new Purdue enology quick resource reference card should be distributed to all Indiana wineries. It would have a 1-800-number and website to contact Purdue University specialists in enology, viticulture, and marketing with questions and concerns. Dr. Christian Butzke will take the lead on this effort.
 - f. **Consultation.** The Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff will continue to be available for consultation for enology questions by phone, email, or onsite winery visits.
 - g. **Grape to Glass.** The Purdue Wine Grape Team will continue to publish on a bimonthly basis the Grape to Glass newsletter.

2. Sustainable Grape Production in Indiana

Dynamic, ever changing climate conditions in Indiana make grape cultivar and site selection critical factors for viticulture success. Adverse, severe weather, especially extremely cold winters and excessive rain and disease pressure can cause significant grape production losses. Row crop pesticide drift issues continue to plague some Indiana grape growers. Wine grapes are grown on about 600 acres in Indiana so most Indiana wineries depend on the importation of grapes or juice from other states to satisfy their fermentation and wine production demands. There is interest in expanding grape production in Indiana, but weather conditions, labor availability, herbicide drift, and competitive pricing make it very challenging. The following are recommendations to enhance Indiana wine grape production.

- a. **Facilitate Grape Grower Winemaker Relationships.** Purdue University faculty and staff will work with grape producers and winemakers to develop some contract and partnership examples to encourage increased vineyard plantings that incorporate appropriate cultivar selection and production practices including price premiums and production risk management strategies. An Advisory Team of grape producers will assist with this effort. Drs. Marshall Martin and Bruce Bordelon will guide this effort.
- b. **Vineyard Research.** The grape research plantings at the Meigs (TPAC) and SWPAC farms will be modified as appropriate to conduct research on cultivar selection and best management practices to minimize risks and maximize sustainability. Dr. Bruce Bordelon will guide this research and Extension effort with assistance from a new staff member who is expected to be hired in 2020.
- c. **Stakeholder Communications.** Alternative methods of communication with stakeholders should be entertained. A webinar series will be developed to cover topics such as: cultivar selection, pruning and training, insect and disease identification, pesticide selection and application. Some viticulture information is now available on the Purdue University website under “Through the Grapevine: (<https://ag.purdue.edu/foodsci/extension/winegrapeteam/Pages/defaulty.aspx>)
- d. **Viticulture Newsletters.** Timely contributions on viticulture topics will be published in the *Grape to Glass* and *Facts for Fancy Fruit* Newsletters.
- e. **Timely Response to Inquiries.** Purdue University viticulture faculty and staff will respond quickly to inquiries from growers via emails, phone calls, and vineyard site visits. There will be increased use of social media platforms.
- f. **Remote Sensing.** Dr. Bruce Bordelon will continue to explore use of UAVs and data interpretation for vineyard health monitoring.
- g. **Vineyard Surveys.** Dr. Bruce Bordelon will conduct a statewide survey of vineyards for the presence of new and existing pest problems such as Grapevine Trunk

Disease, Grape Root Borer, Spotted Lanterfly and others. Survey findings will be published in newsletters and shared at various Extension venues.

- h. **Cost of Production.** With assistance from the Department of Agricultural Economics, a review of literature, and as appropriate, grape cost of production analysis will be conducted. Dr. Marshall Martin will guide this initiative.

3. Driving Consumer Demand

Our society appears to be more focused than in the past on their food and beverage choices. Consumers are concerned about the safety of the products they consume, want to know more about how they are produced, seek quality choices and expect a desirable ambience where they purchase and consume food and beverages. New trends continue to develop as to where consumers obtain information about wines with perhaps less interest in medals at competitions and are more aware of web blogs and opinions of their friends. Often wine consumption is associated with a particular experience such as a music venue, wedding or family event, a wine trail, winefest, or other ways that the wine purchase is a component of a larger experience which the consumer values. These experiences may vary by the consumer generation— Boomers vs Generation X vs Millennials. Their family finance and purchase habits differ. The challenge is to market Indiana wine to a diverse clientele.

Marketing and promotion activities to consider in this Strategic Plan include:

- a. **Enhance the Indiana Brand.** In collaboration with the Indiana Wineries and Vineyard Association, the Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff and Indiana Wine Grape Council should discuss ways to enhance the Indiana wine brand/industry image. Appointment of a small subcommittee might be appropriate to facilitate this branding process. Katie Barnett will lead this effort.
- b. **Local Winery Marketing.** Katie Barnett, in collaboration with others such as Drs. Marshall Martin and Maria Marshall, will develop educational materials to guide local wineries to develop their own unique marketing and promotional efforts drawing on content and social media marketing. The material could be placed on the Purdue Wine Grape website and used in regional seminars.
- c. **Financial and Business Planning.** Katie Barnett, in collaboration with others such as Drs. Marshall Martin and Maria Marshall, will prepare educational materials for local wineries and grape producers on how to develop business and financial plans. These plans could be useful for start-up as well as established wineries that wish to expand their operation. Each winery could develop its own unique plans to establish their business strategy, train employees, and share with bank loan officials.
- d. **Communication.** Katie Barnett, along with assistance from Jill Blume, will contribute to *Grape to Glass*, Purdue Wine Grape Team website, Hort Congress sessions, and elsewhere information on the efforts of the Purdue Wine Grape faculty and staff to

market the brand and image of quality Indiana wines. An example is the Traminette campaign.

- e. **Indiana Winefests and Trails.** Katie Barnett will lead educational efforts to guide wineries on potential successful ways to organize and manage their local or regional wine trails and winefests. The intent is to not manage them, but provide professional assistance and ideas about how to plan and organize such successful events. This could be accomplished through focus groups, seminars, Wine Grape Council meetings, and at the Indiana Winery and Vineyard summer meeting. A first step could be an Indiana wine industry wine fest interest survey.
- f. **Understanding Indiana Wine Palettes and Preferences.** Katie Barnett, with logistical support from the Indiana Wine Grape Council, via focus group and surveys will explore ways to increase sales of Indiana produced wines. This should explore different consumer palettes and wine preferences.
- g. **Statewide Outreach.** Purdue University faculty and staff will continue to visit Indiana wineries and sponsor regional marketing seminars. The Wine Grape Council should share responsibility for advertising and promoting attendance at these regional seminars and regional winery hosted events.
- h. **Microbreweries.** Microbreweries have expanded rapidly in Indiana and throughout the United States. Purdue faculty and staff should gather information on the efforts of microbreweries that could help Indiana wineries learn how to successfully manage in an environment of expansion of microbreweries.
- i. **Share Successes.** The Purdue University faculty and staff should share in *Grapes to Glass* and elsewhere wine marketing success stories from other states and lessons to be learned.