

Inside the Vines

Doc chronicles Kentucky's emerging wine industry

Kentucky's history as [one of the] world leaders in growing grapes and producing quality wines is a fascinating story. We want to let people know about that history, but more importantly we want them to know what's happening now as we re-claim that history."

— **Dennis Walter, president, Kentucky Grape and Wine Council.**

Bourbon is what typically comes to mind when anyone envisions the adult beverage of choice for the blue-grass state. But Jean Jacques Dufour, winemaker for the Marquis de LaFayette, founded what's considered to be the nation's first commercial vineyard just down the road in (what is now) Nicholasville in 1798. By 1860, Kentucky was the third-largest grape producing state. The Civil War and Prohibition intervened before Kentucky could take the Napa Valley path. But today, vineyards and wineries and winemakers are a growing component of the state's emerging farm-to-table movement -- making inroads in what has been a long road for Kentucky's tobacco transition toward sustainable long-term ag growth.

Even New Yorker Joel Stein has been pleasantly surprised, ranking a Kentucky wine one of his favorites last year in a Bottle Shock-like moment. He wrote in his 2008 "50 States of Wine" article in Time Magazine, "I had an entire group of snotty Los Angelinos demanding we open this wine just so we could make fun of it. There's a white rose on the label, it's from Kentucky, and its name is clearly a desperate attempt to market the wine for weddings and derbies. [Celebration

White from Equus Run.] We were going to bury this wine. And yet, it was delightful. Fun and light like a pinot grigio but drier and smarter without trying too hard, maybe like an Italian Orvieto. Kentucky, you charmed me."

Cynthia Bohn, owner of Equus Run vineyards, says "Kentucky has the opportunity to expand agricultural diversity with its greenbelt capability in growing grapes and our growers dedication and pride as supported by the Kentucky Proud Program. Our winemakers are work-

ing their venues from soil to shelf with exciting results."

Pam Leet, who owns Lovers Leap with husband Logan, says, "We believe that viticulture is one healthy and natural alternative to the renaissance of Kentucky agriculture and, indeed, agritourism, as so many of our visitors from around the world are amazed as they emerge from the small, wooded country road to our winery and are delighted to find vineyards in the vein of Napa Valley."

As Kentucky vineyards grow and mature and thrive, Bohn says she's thankful for those who helped along the way, remembering, "I had been given 'Farmer Rick's' name by local neighbors to help us mow and till the fields in preparation for planting tobacco and grapes on the farm. I had never met Farmer Rick -- but spoke to him many times on the cell phone. He would simply show up and work the fields and then leave -- yet I never met him. Until one day I was at the winery and I overheard his voice in a group of people and I finally had the chance to meet my wonderful farm neighbor that had graciously taken care of us -- especially since we didn't even own a tractor or implements to start a vineyard in the first place! It was through his generosity that we prepared our fields, planted our vineyard and harvested our crops. 'Farmer Rick' and his wife Amanda will always be cherished for their help in starting our vineyard. They wanted to be involved in the new exciting agriculture diversity of wine growing." ■



Vintage Kentucky

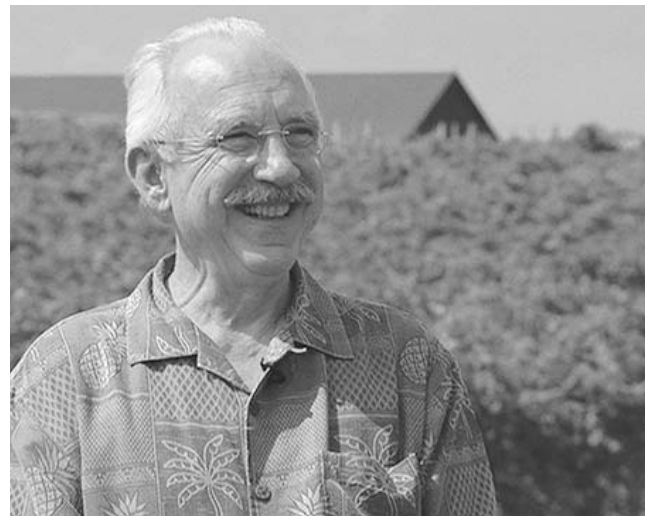
The Movie



owners, winemakers and 10 wineries. Scientists and wine industry experts from the University of Kentucky, who have helped Kentucky farmers make the transition to growing grapes, also appear in the film.

Already, the industry's resurgence is having an impact on state tourism. Fueled by consumer interest in agritourism and the support of local farmers and businesses, visitation at Kentucky's wineries continues to grow, and wineries offer a wide variety of experiences such as wine tastings, concerts, theme dinners, art shows and festivals. ■

Info, Kentucky Department of Agriculture's grape and wine marketing program, go to kyagr.com/marketing/plantmktg/grape.htm.



Dr. Tom Cottrell, Extension enologist at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, is interviewed in the documentary *Vintage Kentucky*.

Vintage Kentucky: The Vine to Wine Experience chronicles Kentucky's wine industry from its status as a national leader in the 1800s, to its demise as a result of Prohibition, to its current re-emergence.

This 30-minute documentary, a project by the Kentucky Grape and Wine Council and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, will be shown statewide on KET with the first airing on Thursday, Nov. 5 at 10:30pm Eastern time (ket.org).

"Kentucky's history as being among the world leaders in growing grapes and producing quality wines is a fascinating story," said Dennis Walter, president of the Kentucky Grape and Wine Council. "We want to let people know about that history, but more importantly we want them to know what's happening now as we re-claim that history. More and more vineyards are springing up across the Commonwealth, and wonderful wines are being made and enjoyed right here."

"Kentucky Proud wineries are growing all over the Commonwealth," Agriculture Commissioner and potential gubernatorial candidate Richie Farmer said. "This documentary will introduce viewers to a few of the people

who are operating these wineries and producing award-winning wines."

Kentucky became home to the nation's first commercial vineyard when in 1798 the Marquis de Lafayette's winemaker, Jean-Jacques Dufour, planted what he called the "First Vineyard" on 600 acres of land in what is now Jessamine County. By the late 1800s Kentucky had become the country's third-largest grape and wine producer. The industry was wiped out by Prohibition and didn't begin its resurrection until 1976, when Kentucky lawmakers passed a bill allowing wineries to operate. Today Kentucky has more than 50 wineries and an estimated 500 acres dedicated to the growing of grapes.

After the Kentucky Grape and Wine Council and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture commissioned the production, filming began in August 2008 and was completed by the end of July 2009. The film features Kentucky vineyard



A wine tasting at Talon Vineyard and Winery on Tates Creek is included in the documentary *Vintage Kentucky*.

Lovers Leap Wins Gold

In October, Lovers Leap Vineyards and Winery received the CONCORDANCE GOLD medal for its G — an American Gewurztraminer wine, at the Wines of the South Competition, held in Knoxville, TN on October 17th.

Concordance Gold is issued when 100 percent of the judging panel selects the wine for a Gold Medal. Only 14 Awards of this level were awarded in the blind tasting, out of 471 entries.

Lovers Leap also received two Silver Awards, for its 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon and Cynthiana, and two



Pam Leet, with Emily Ashburn

Bronze Awards for Riesling and Sloppy Seconds. This recognition follows the GOLD Medal Award at this year's

Kentucky State Fair for the winery's 'Cynthiana.'

New winemaker and Lovers Leap owner, Logan Leet, says, "I have been most fortunate to have a strong vineyard staff that laid the groundwork before we took this project over in August, 2008. My goal is to develop the best Kentucky wines possible in a competitive, international market."

Lovers Leap Vineyards and Winery is located in the hills of the Kentucky River basin in Anderson County just outside Lawrenceburg. The soils and water at Lovers Leap, famous for producing tobacco and renowned bourbons, are now growing grapes for wine. ■