

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection  
Division of Marketing  
Agricultural Development and Diversification Program (ADD)

Grant Project Final Report

Contract Number: 15100

Grant Project Title:                   Establishing a Commercial Grape Production  
Industry As An Alternative To Tobacco  
Production - Year 1

Project Beginning Date:               July 1, 2000  
Project End Date:                      August 31, 2001

Amount of Funding Awarded:       \$28,054

Grant Project Submitted by:         The Northern Wisconsin Tobacco Exposition

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Report Submitted by:                 Timothy Rehbein  
Date:                                    August 29, 2001

# WDATECP-ADD Grant Project Final Report

## "Establishing A Commercial Grape Production Industry As An Alternative To Tobacco Production - Year 1"

### 1) Describe the original intent of the grant project.

Tobacco production in the northern growing region of Wisconsin has declined drastically in the past 20 years. The tremendous decline in the tobacco industry has caused a loss in the agriculture economy for the region. A loss in the ag economy is amplified when its reduction is multiplied through the general economy.

The overall intent of this project was to establish a commercial grape production industry in the northern Wisconsin tobacco growing region utilizing the farmer network system that is currently being successfully used by the rotational grazing networks.

The main economic benefit of the project was to develop a "new" economic base in agriculture to replace what tobacco had contributed.

The objectives of the project were:

At least twenty tobacco growers from the northern Wisconsin tobacco growing region will:

- 1) Become knowledgeable about commercial grape production.
- 2) Select a grape production system based on the market potential of wine, juice and/or table grapes.
- 3) Establish a commercial vineyard of one quarter to one half acre in size.
- 4) Rebuild the agricultural economy that was lost due to the decline in the tobacco industry.
- 5) Establish a "grape grower" network to enhance the education process and to provide added synergism with trouble shooting establishment challenges.

None of the objectives were adjusted during the project.

### 2) Describe the work conducted in this project.

The project started with a mailing announcing the grant project and an informational meeting to all tobacco growers and allotment holders in Vernon, Crawford, Richland, Monroe and LaCrosse Counties. A general news release was also ran in all the local papers announcing the informational meeting. Contacting all tobacco growers and allotment holders was rather easy because of the tremendous, positive cooperation received from the Farm Service Agency Offices in the project counties.

The Tobacco Exposition board served as the steering committee for the project. A project application form was drafted and approved by the committee. The informational meeting was held on Saturday, October 21, 2000 with 47 people present. The grant project was explained and applications were handed out. Twenty seven applications were received for consideration in the

project. The steering committee met and selected 20 applicants along with 4 alternates. By the official start of the project, 4 applicants had dropped out and the 4 alternates were used.

A series of grower schools were conducted in December 2000, January 2001, February 2001 and March 2001. The first two schools covered marketing options and types of grapes for the various markets. The balance of the schools covered all the production and management areas. After the second grower school, many project participants ordered their transplant vines for spring 2001 planting.

Seasoned members of the Minnesota Grape Growers Association were used as some of the guest presenters (consultants) at the grower schools along with the wine maker from the Northern Vineyards Winery, a cooperative in Minnesota.

The 3 major sources of material used in the grower schools were: The Minnesota Grape Growers Association Handbook, Vineyard Establishment I and Vineyard Establishment II published by Michigan State University. Teaching outlines on Power Point were also prepared for each session.

In April, site visitations were made to every project cooperator to take soil samples and to help with vineyard site selection and layout. Assistance was also received from Jim Radke of the Natural Resources and Conservation Service in helping to lay out vineyards that were on slopes. This allowed the vineyard to be planted on the contour.

Because Wisconsin did not have a very good researched fertility recommendation for grape production, each of the soil test results had to be interpreted with University of Minnesota procedure and soil fertility recommendations were written on an individual basis.

Grape transplants were shipped from nurseries to the project cooperators in late April and early May. One challenge of the project was for those who received their grapes early. It was a very wet spring and it was difficult to till as needed and plant when the grapes arrived. The project cooperators however did a good job of keeping the vines cool and moist and dormant until they could get into the field.

Given the high cost of the vines and trellis material, it was evident from the start of the project, that the cost sharing provided by WDATCP-ADD was the key reason why people 1) came to the information meeting and 2) were willing to invest their time and inputs into the project. I can confidently say that the number of participants in the project would have been considerably lower without the grant.

A key to the success of year 1 of the project was many of the participants attended ALL the grower schools and only a few missed one or two. The participants were motivated enough to see the need to learn as much about grape production as possible before the growing season arrived.

A major challenge faced by the project was the time line for grape production that did not easily fit the grant time line. Following the announcement of the grant received and meeting with the steering committee, it was September already and the Vernon County Fair. Work on the project could not start up again until early October and by the time participants were selected, it was early November. What we learned in the grower schools was the preference to do all the tillage to the

proposed vineyard site the fall before planting. This could not be done given the fact that it was November already. This meant that the project cooperators were already "behind the eight ball". The good news is, we knew it and we knew we had to concentrate at getting things done in spring.

### 3) Describe the public outreach efforts of this project.

During the course of the project, progress reports were verbally given at the monthly Vernon County UW-Extension Education Committee meeting. Periodic reports were also given on WVRQ radio on the A.M. station during the UW-Extension Report. A one half hour radio program was also conducted on the UW-LaCrosse public radio station about the project. The program was hosted by UW-Extension Family Living Agent for La Crosse County, Mary Mehan-Strub.

At the beginning of the project, the business writer from the La Crosse Tribune wrote an article about the project which appeared in the Monday business section. The same business writer did a follow-up article in June 2001, with an interview of one of the growers to document progress.

On June 23, 2001, an open to the public field day was held at the vineyard of Shirley and Duane Stephensons, just outside of Viroqua. A short project cooperator meeting was held first, followed by a lunch and then the open to the public field day. Approximately 25 people from Vernon and surrounding counties attended the field day. Information on the WDATCP-ADD program was handed out to all participants. News releases on the field day were sent out to all the state-wide ag newspapers.

The week following the field day, the project coordinator received phone calls from Lake Geneva and Antigo stating that they were not able to make the field day, but were interested in the program and grape production.

### 4) Describe the results of this project.

Given the objectives listed in section one above, the steering committee, project coordinator and the project cooperators all believe that all the objectives of the project have been met and also met our expectations.

Twenty one commercial vineyards have been established through this project. The project cooperators attended the grower schools to become knowledgeable about commercial grape production. Growers selected the type of marketing system they wanted to work with and then selected the type of grape that fit the marketing. Most of the project cooperators planted a one half acre vineyard with many planting more than the one half acre. The agriculture economy has been helped already by the project with many project cooperators buying supplies such as trellis material and fungicides from local stores and suppliers. Some of the cooperators did hire some part-time labor to assist with the planting. The group has also held together as a grape grower network. They are planning to hold vineyard walks and visits this fall.

As of the end of August, 2001, the grape vines are healthy and growing vigorously. We have learned that we can grow grapes in Wisconsin knowing that our next major challenge will be getting them through their first winter. We have learned that there is definitely a market for wine grapes, juice grapes and table grapes. We have also learned that we will have challenges to the growing of grapes such as disease (number 1) and "critters" (deer, raccoon, birds).

If the timetable for commercial grape production moves along accordingly, without too many surprises, the group feels that we have started the foundation of a grape industry in Wisconsin that will stay and prosper. The group also feels that in the very near future, a regional winery could be opened in the area based on the cooperative structure. There are increased numbers of regional wineries in Missouri, Illinois, Ohio and Indiana. They feel we can also do it here in Southwest Wisconsin.

5) How will the Wisconsin agriculture industry be able to use the information from this project?

The start of the commercial grape industry project had to start from the extreme very beginning. No one had any knowledge of grape production prior to this project. The "start-up" information from this project can be therefore used by anyone interested in getting started in grape production. Because the basis of the project was to function as a group for learning and problem solving, the same can be used for sharing our project information with anyone interested in getting started in grape production. Every single project cooperators would be more than happy to answer questions and tell their start-up story to any who stopped in or called.

6) Include any research data that support your conclusions for this project.

Grape Project Participant Planting Summary  
Number of Vines Planted, Spring 2001

Edelweiss	3,062
Blue Bell	1,134
Foch	965
Frontencac	279
Swenson Red	126
Valiant	111
Canadice	106
Gerwurztraminer	103
Concord	77
Stuben	60
Seyval	50
Petite Jewel	46
Kandiyohi	31
Swenson White	25
Reliance	25
Traminette	20
Interlaken	17
King of the North	15
Fredonia	10
Trubador	5
Total planted	6,267

Project Cooperator Summary  
July 2000 through August 2001

Grower, Address, Phone

Vine Planted    Number Use    Marketing

Eric Aranetta (In the project at only 1/4 acre rate)

E4282 Dodson Hollow Road

Chaseburg, WI 54621

Home phone: 608-483-2528

Foch	31	Wine	Northern Vineyards Winery (Cooperative)
Frontenac	21	Wine	Northern Vineyards Winery
Edelweiss	18	Wine	Self use
Blue Bell	15	Table	Farmers Market

Roberta Dolezal

52360 Dolezal Dr.

Soldiers Grove, WI 54655

Home phone: 608-624-3396

Traumanet	20	Wine	Experimental
Edelweiss	150	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Foch	50	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	25	Table	Direct Market

Vernadine Doll

52385 Doll Dr.

Soldiers Grove, WI 54655

Home phone: 608-735-4701

Edelweiss	360	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	180	Table	Farmers Market
Swenson Red	90	Table	Farmers Market

Mark and Kersten Drake

10980 Fairway Rd.

Sparta, WI, 54656

Home phone: 608-269-5955

Edelweiss	200	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	10	Table	Direct Market
Frontenac	10	Wine	Experimental

James Geise

13036 Helgerson Hill Rd.

Soldiers Grove, WI 54655

Home phone: 608-735-4404

Frontenac	150	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Edelweiss	150	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Seyval	50	Wine	Experimental
Foch	200	Wine	Northern Vineyards

Ronald and Karen Haakenson  
 S3349A Old HWY 14  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-634-3926

Blue Bell	65	Table	Direct Market
Edelweiss	296	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Valiant	5	Table	Experimental

Ben Hansen  
 S5030 Hansen Lane  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-689-2585

Edelweiss	200	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	25	Table	Direct Market

Lloyd and Amy Hardy  
 E6791 Belgium Ridge Rd.  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-637-7669

Edelweiss	250	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Valiant	10	Table	Experimental
Fredonia	10	Table	Experimental
Blue Bell	20	Table	Direct Market
Foch	20	Wine	Direct Market
Reliance	25	Table	Direct Market
Interlaken	17	Table	Experimental
Canadice	10	Table	Experimental
Frontenac	10	Wine	Direct Market
Petite Jewel	10	Table	Direct Market
Trubador	5	Table	Experimental

Warren and Marcy Haugen  
 E8043 Seas Branch Rd.  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-634-2017

Blue Bell	60	Table	Farmers Market
Valiant	60	Juice	Wholesale
Stuben	60	Table	Direct Market
Foch	60	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Edelweiss	60	Wine	Northern Vineyards

Peter and Nina Holte  
 S366 Lee Lane  
 Coon Valley, WI 54623  
 Home phone: 608-452-3844

Edelweiss	125	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	125	Table	Farmers Market
Frontenac	10	Wine	Experimental

Julian Holen Jr.  
S783 Spring Coulee Ridge Rd.  
Westby, WI 54667  
Home phone: 608-634-4094

Edelweiss	110	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	110	Table	Direct Market

Ken and Shirley Hooverson  
E7053 Hinkst Hollow Rd.  
Viroqua, WI 54665  
Home phone: 608-675-3611

Foch	212	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Canadice	21	Table	Direct Market

Chuck Manske  
E3265 CTH O  
Viroqua, WI 54665  
Home phone: 608-483-2516

Canadice	75	Table	Direct Market
Edelweiss	175	Wine	Northern Vineyards

Larry and Donna Mikshowsky  
W1425 ST HWY 33  
Bangor, WI 54614  
Home phone: 608-452-3641

Blue Bell	225	Table	Direct Market
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Rick and Barb Mikshowsky  
N361 Goplin Rd.  
Coon Valley, WI 54623  
Home phone: 608-452-3640

Edelweiss	193	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Blue Bell	50	Table	Direct Market

Mary Olsen  
28383 Nordic Rd.  
Ontario, WI 54651  
Home phone: 608-435-6571

Blue Bell	110	Table	Direct Market
Edelweiss	110	Table	Direct Market

JoAnne and Freddie Shird  
E13460 Jug Creek Rd.  
La Farge, WI 54639  
Home phone: 608-625-2768

Foch	125	Wine	Experimental
Edelweiss	100	Wine	Northern Vineyards

Solverson Family  
 Phil, MaryBeth, Tim, Peter, Patrick  
 S5086 Boat Landing Rd.  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-637-3987

Blue Bell	42	Table	Direct Market
Frontenac	42	Wine	Northern Vineyards
King of the North	15	Table	Direct Market
Foch	42	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Edelweiss	84	Wine	Northern Vineyards

Robert Starks  
 S3459 Dahl Rd..  
 Viroqua, WI 54665

Edelweiss	250	Wine	Northern Vineyards
Foch	22	Wine	Direct Market
Gerwurztraminer	103	Wine	Northern Vineyards

Shirley and Duane Stephenson  
 S5193 CTH NN  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-637-6761

Blue Bell	72	Table	Direct Market
Kandiyohi	31	Table	Direct Market
Concord	77	Table	Direct Market
Swenson Red	36	Table	Direct Market
Swenson White	25	Table	Direct Market
Edelweiss	11	Wine	Direct Market
Petite Jewel	36	Table	Direct Market
Frontenac	36	Wine	Direct Market
Valiant	36	Table	Direct Market

Bonnie Sterling  
 S5834 S. Harrison Hollow Rd.  
 Viroqua, WI 54665  
 Home phone: 608-637-2049

Edelweiss	220	Wine	Northern Vineyards
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Loren Cade of Rt 2 Viroqua also planted grapes at all his own expense. The LaFarge High School Ag Department also planted some grapes. The Viroqua High School Ag Department ran a grape vine nursery as an FFA Project and the DeSoto FFA planted a vineyard.

7) Include any other information you feel is appropriate.

Sample of newspaper article  
 Pictures of the project cooperators and their vineyards.