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### Natural / Physical Resources

**Thinking Outside the Wine Box about Climate Change & the Future of Wine**

April 23, 2019 by Mike Veseth, The Wine Economist

The impact of climate change on your wine business goes beyond what you see in your vineyard or cellar and the cost of inaction now in terms of future consequences is likely to be pretty high. Climate change creates losers and some winners and the policies that are eventually adopted to deal with it will be the same. It is difficult to imagine a scenario where wine will be among the winners and we can already see the negative effects

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### Nuusbrokkies / News Snippets

**SA wine’s essential problem – too many small producers, not enough market**

April 24, 2019, by Michael Fridjhon

The impassioned pleas of the wine industry for an increase in the price of grapes or bulk wine have been based on the commercial reality confronting growers in the Cape. Depending on what you consider “under-recovering on input costs” somewhere between 40% and 70% are losing money. At this rate of attrition most could be out of business in the next decade.

If all that your brand requires is healthy grapes with a hint of varietal character there’s no need to spend more. More than 50% of all wine sold in South Africa falls into this category – because that’s the volume that appears on shelf at under R50 per bottle. It’s increasingly unlikely that what is euphemistically called “table wine” will come from the traditional production areas.

At this point the key differentiator is volume – and here the problem is that 50% of all the country’s producers crush 5000 cases or less. Businesses this small are marginal at R100 per bottle because there’s too much overhead for the available volume, and they can’t afford to become bigger because they can’t afford to invest in branding and marketing strategies.

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Here’s How America Uses Its Land

There are many statistical measures that show how productive the U.S. is. Its economy is the largest in the world and the unemployment rate is near the lowest mark in a half century.

What can be harder to decipher is how Americans use their land to create wealth. The 48 contiguous states alone are a 1.9 billion-acre jigsaw puzzle of cities, farms, forests and pastures that Americans use to feed themselves, power their economy and extract value for business and pleasure.

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Technology

5 ways information technology can improve winemaking

In the not-so-distant past, winemakers relied solely on memory and well-worn, possibly wine stained, spiral bound notebooks to keep track of the winemaking process.

When adopting technology to improve operational efficiency, wineries would be well served to consider the following:

1. Modern software and hardware make the benefits of technology available where it is needed.
2. Technology, properly selected and incorporated into a wine business, can dramatically decrease labor costs and increase efficiencies.
3. Improve consistency in processes and minimize work associated with repeatable, multistep winemaking operations.
4. Identify key performance indicators in the winemaking process with visual displays to alert the team to trigger decisions or actions.
5. Enables winemakers in all sizes of wineries to comply with regulatory requirements of lot tracking.

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The Age of Robot Farmers

In the high season, Wish Farms, located near Plant City, Florida, picks, chills, and ships some twenty million strawberries—all handpicked by a seasonal workforce of six hundred and fifty farm laborers. Until recently, Wishnatzki has relied on cheap labor to get his berries picked—a fundamental of American agriculture, along with abundant land and water. In recent years, though, seasonal labor has become much more scarce, and more expensive—making it difficult for growers of apples, citrus, berries, lettuce, melons, and other handpicked produce-aisle items to harvest their crops. Years of attempts to crack down on illegal immigration, both at the state and the federal level, partly explain these chronic shortages. In 2011, for example, Georgia enacted a strict immigration law that targeted undocumented workers and their employers. Later that year, the state reportedly lost eleven thousand crop workers. To fill the gap, officials established a program whereby nonviolent offenders nearing the end of their prison terms could do paid farmwork. The program had few takers, and many prisoners and probationers who did try it walked off the job, because the work was so hard. Georgia farmers lost more than a hundred and twenty million dollars. The solution, Gary Wishnatzki, one of the owners of Wish Farms, believes, is to make a robot that can pick strawberries. He and a business partner, Bob Pitzer, have been developing one for the past six years. With the latest iteration of their invention—known around the farm as Berry 5.1—they are getting close. A number of startups are also trying to build a strawberry-picking robot. Among them are a machine that has been developed at Utsunomiya University, in Japan, another by Dogtooth, in the U.K., and a third by Octinion, in Belgium. The Spanish company Agrobot is also testing one. There are prototypes of high-tech orange, grape, and apple harvesters in development as well. (Editor’s note: We highly recommend this article for its insights into the convergence of technology and the politics and economics of agriculture and of
labor.)
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