

daily news



Suisun Valley Wine Cooperative Tasting Room Set to Open

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From Daily News Links, 06/14/2007



The Suisun Valley AVA has approximately 3,000 acres planted under vines.

Although grapes have been grown in the Suisun Valley for over a century and its own American Viticultural Area (AVA) was approved in late 1982, the area has long been overshadowed by higher-profile neighboring regions like the Napa Valley. With this month's opening of a new co-op tasting room in Suisun City, growers and vintners in the area are hoping to raise their profile among consumers and trade alike.

The multi-winery tasting room, known as Suisun Valley Wine Co-op, will debut with five different wineries: Sunset Cellars, Twilight Ridge, King Andrews Vineyards, Shale Peak Vineyards and Winterhawk. Open Thursday through Sunday from noon to five, the tasting room will be staffed by a volunteer workforce of winery owners and winemakers.

Roger King, president of the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association and a longtime grower with Ledgewood Vineyards, said the tasting room is vital to the success of the area. "The AVA is really old, but you can't stand there and hold a grape up and say, 'this is the AVA.' You need to have a bottle of wine to stand behind," he said.

Of the AVA's estimated 3,000 acres, King said only four percent of production stays within the AVA. "That's a big part of why we're moving forward with what we're doing," he said. "We are finally getting to a place that might provide some rewards long-term. It's a competitive world out there and it's exciting to know you maybe have half a leg to compete on."

King also said that a multi-winery facility was more appealing than encouraging each individual winery to establish a tasting room. "This satisfies our ability to spread some costs as we set up and go forward, but also allows opportunities for other Suisun Valley growers or winemakers that are looking to make Suisun Valley wines or use Suisun Valley fruit," said King. "The rewards come. I grow fruit right now that is getting 90-plus scores. I am not any special grape grower at all, but it means that this valley is capable of growing luxury class fruit. The potential is there, but if you can't sell it, nothing happens."

There is room for more wineries to join the cooperative, as King indicated that plans allow for a maximum of seven wineries with connections to the Suisun Valley. "It doesn't matter to me if a producer doesn't grow a berry here but buys grapes from local growers, or if a grower here does custom crush elsewhere. It's about building the incubation of more wineries because we need critical mass," King said.