

Avoiding Success – Observations on Some of the More Common Mistakes in the Grape and Wine Industry

Andy Allen

Chair, Viticulture and Enology Program

Arkansas Tech University-Ozark



ARKANSAS
TECH
UNIVERSITY
OZARK
CAMPUS

Where do the more common mistakes come from?

- Lack of knowledge
 - About grape/wine production
 - About industry functions and dynamics
- Lack of planning
 - “Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.”
- Sometimes just making bad decisions regardless

“Proper site selection and site preparation are critical components to viticultural success. Doing a poor job of either is like preparing to run a race by shooting yourself in the foot.”

- Said by somebody not famous.

Poor site selection

- Site is important because it impacts several aspects of grape production:
 - Frost/freeze risk
 - Insect/disease/animal problems
 - Potential yield and fruit quality
 - Health and longevity of the vineyard
 - Costs of production, profitability, economic viability

Poor site selection









Poor/no site preparation

- Importance of pre-plant site preparation:
 - Necessary to prepare proper conditions for healthy and extensive root growth
 - First and best chance to correct soil pH and nutritional condition
 - First and best chance to correct soil drainage problems
 - Best opportunity to remove perennial weeds, brush, trees
 - Create or maintain uniformity within blocks



Poor variety selection

- Importance of winegrape variety selection:
 - Should have good wine quality potential
 - Should be suited to local climatic conditions
 - Should be in demand or capable of being sold (at a profit)
 - Should be economical to produce
- Worst reason: I like the wine!
 - BTW, if a variety is totally unsuited to your climate, trying a different clone is not likely to make it work

Establishment and management practices

- Poor trellis design
- Weed management
- Irrigation management
- Really bad pruning







Winemakers aren't exempt

- Problems (mostly with those new to commercial winemaking) due to:
 - Oxidation
 - Poor/improper cleaning and sanitation
 - Improper/no use of SO₂

Poor business/marketing planning

- Vineyards
 - Often because of no understanding of how industry functions
 - “I’m going to grow grapes and sell them to the local winery.”
Q: Does the winery know this?
 - Relying on chance (a.k.a. - the spot market)
 - Relying heavily on a single buyer
- Wineries
 - Overestimating market demand
 - Field of (Broken) Dreams - “If you ferment it they will come”
 - Winemakers making the wines they like to drink

Industry unity

- Avoid factions
- Industry cooperation – work together as an industry to raise quality level and promote improvement in grape and wine production
- Promote your industry as a whole and everybody benefits