



Growing grapes for wine production is topic at Ag Day

By Josh Moffitt/Arizona vines and wines magazine

This year the Southeast Arizona Ag Day will feature a program about Arizona's viticulture. Recognizing the significance of growing grapes for wine production in Arizona, the group will include a discussion by Dr. Mike Kilby, Dr. Mary Olsen, Dr. Ed Martin, and Dr. Don Slack. Kilby is retired from the UofA and provides vineyard consulting services in the Willcox area. Olsen is a plant pathologist at the University of Arizona, specializing in plant diseases and has experience in grapevine pathogens. Martin is an irrigation specialist with the UofA; and Slack is an agricultural engineer and has an interest in a vineyard in the Sonoita area.

Most Willcox locals are probably aware of Coronado Vineyards and Crop Circle Vineyards. Both have billboards on I-10 and have been open for about 3 years. But what residents may not be aware of is all of the vineyards and wineries that are located outside of Willcox proper or are still in development. It won't be long before there is a much larger vineyard and winery presence in the Willcox area.

Opening soon in Historical Downtown are Keeling-Schaefer Vineyards, Carlson Creek Vineyards and Gallifant Cellars.

The list of vineyards and wineries still in development is even longer. There are: Asmundson Family Vineyards, Bench Mark Estates Vineyards, Broken Glass Vineyards, De Leon Vineyards, Golden Rule Vineyards, Hammelman Vineyards, Jorve-MacMillan Vineyards, Lawrence-Dunham Vineyards, Odyssey Cellars, Sandor Vineyards, Sierra Bonita Vineyards and Wayward Winds Winery. Other vineyards that are established in the area, but whose wines are produced elsewhere in the state include: Arizona Stronghold Vineyards, Dick Erath's Cimarron Vineyards, Pillsbury Wine Co. Vineyards.

There is a recently formed local group called 'Willcox Wine Country' that consists of area vineyard owners, members of city council and economic development and other area businesses. The group is operating under the wing of the Willcox Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture. According to the WWC Chairperson and Willcox City Council member, Monika Cronberg, the group's main goal is to promote Willcox as a wine tourism destination.

"Right now the one of the biggest tourism draws for the area is Apple Annie's and other Agro-tourism. Wine tourism is also Agro-tourism. People want to see the vineyards and taste the product [wine]. More tourism means more money being spent at local Willcox businesses and more tax dollars for the city," Cronberg said.

There is also a statewide organization, the Arizona Wine Growers Association (AWGA), which represents the interests of the vineyards and wineries statewide. The AWGA helps to promote Arizona wine by creating a conduit for information to the media and also coordinating public and private events. This organization also was integral in changing the Arizona state wine laws a few years ago allowing the wineries better access to self-promote their product, creating the ability for the smaller growers and winemakers to succeed in the marketplace.