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The Landscape: Wine Country

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Wine Country

by Elizabeth Mylott

Half an hour southwest of Portland, the vineyards and wineries of Yamhill and Columbia counties are altering the physical landscape of the Willamette Valley, while reshaping and redefining the agricultural and tourism industries. Over the past forty years Oregon's wine industry has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry, producing award winning wines while attracting tens of thousands of visitors each year (www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/11/oregon_winemakers_expect_2008.html).

The first recorded vineyard in the area was planted at Fort Vancouver in 1825. Throughout the 1800s, pioneers planted vines throughout the Columbia Gorge, including Zinfandel vines near Hood River that are more than 125 years old (www.oregonwines.com). Oregon's first winery was opened in 1855 and a second was opened in 1883. Prohibition interrupted the state's wine production, and it wasn't until the second half of the twentieth century that the industry became a presence in the state.

Oregon's modern wine industry was started in 1965 when David and Diana Lett planted the first Pinot noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot gris in their vineyard in Yamhill County. The Letts opened Eyrie Vineyards the following year (www.eyrievineyards.com). With a climate similar to Burgundy, France, Oregon proved ideal for growing a variety of grapes, including Cabernet Franc, Gewurttraminer, Syrah, Pinto Noir, Viognier and Muller Thurgau (Oregon Agripedia, 2007 Edition, Oregon Department of Agriculture).

When Eyrie produced its first vintage in 1970s, the region's agricultural and natural resources industries were dominated by fruit orchards, nurseries, livestock, and logging. During the past 40 years the importance of logging and livestock has declined while the wine industry has thrived. Today, grapes for wine are the fourth most important fruit crop in the state (Oregon Agricultural Statistics Survey). A study released in 2006 found that Oregon's wine industry provides more than \$1.4 billion in economic activity for the state each year. More than half of that, \$801 million, comes from direct and indirect impact through sales, wages,



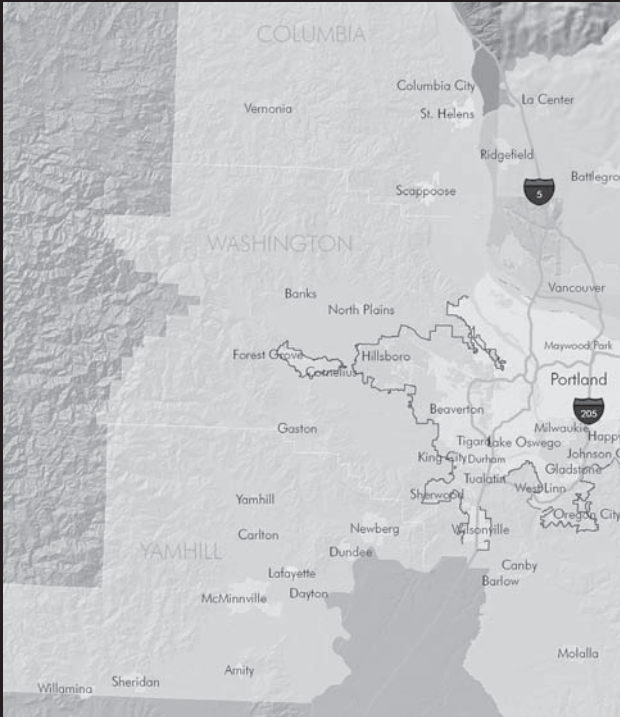
Courtesy of Soter Vineyards, Carlton, OR

and spending. The wine industry and related business provided more than 8,500 jobs in 2006 with wages topping \$203 million (The Economic Impact of the Wine and Wine Grape Industries on the Oregon Economy, Full Glass Research).

Over two-thirds of the state's vineyards and wineries are in the Willamette Valley including Yamhill and Columbia counties. In 2006, 6,710 acres of grapes were grown by 305 vineyards and 17,352 tons of grapes were processed in 154 wineries in the two counties (Oregon Agripedia, 2007 Edition, Oregon Department of Agriculture).

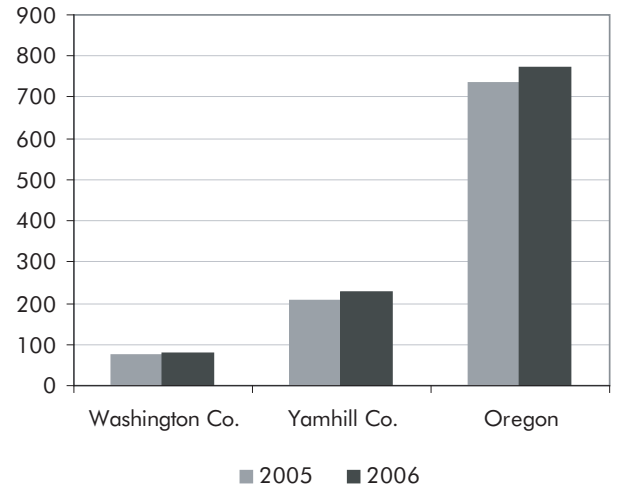
The vineyards and wineries produce more than just wine, they also act as a destination for tourists who come as much for the scenic views as the wine. Visitors to wine country will find more than picturesque landscapes and tasting rooms. In Yamhill County alone attractions include three golf courses, ten art galleries, six museums, and hot air balloon rides offered by two different companies. Many visitors come to the areas for the day or stay in Portland. Visitors to Yamhill County who choose to stay longer have their choice of more than twenty-five inns and bed and breakfasts.

Wine tourism is an important industry for the state. In 2006, it contributed more than \$90 million to Oregon's economy (www.oregonwine.org). Many in the wine business credit Oregon wine country's success as a tourism destination to the laid back, un-Napa like feeling. Developers have pushed for larger, resort style accommodations in the area, however. Over the past few years proposed developments in Newburg and Dundee have forced the wine tourism industry to craft a plan for future growth.

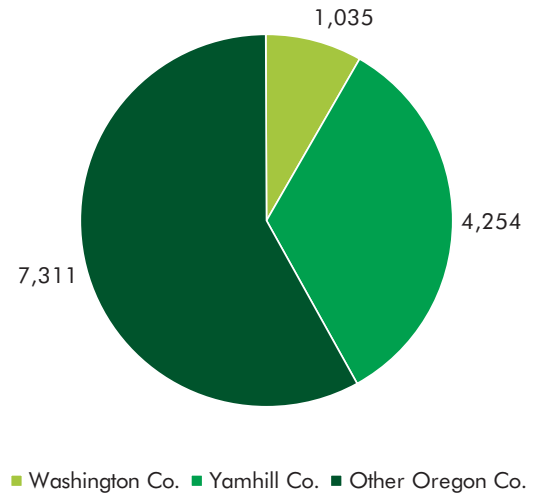


Courtesy of Soter Vineyards, Carlton, OR

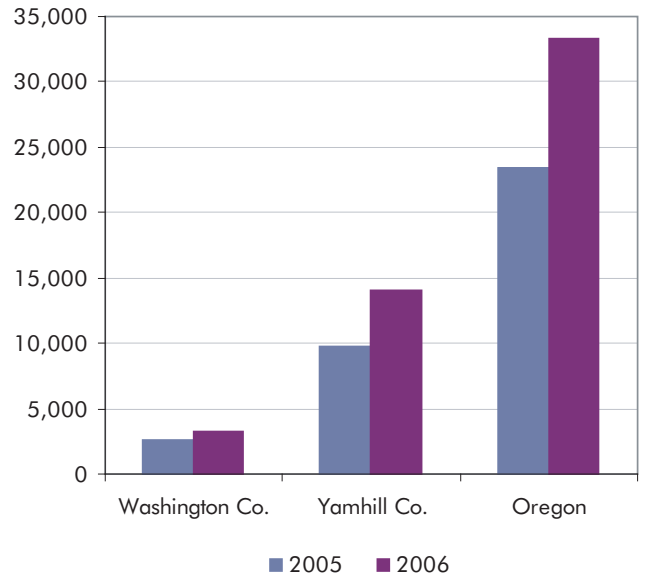
Number of Vineyards
2005 and 2006



Number of Harvested Acres
in 2006



Number of Tons of Wine Grapes Crushed
in 2005 and 2006



Source: Oregon Agripedia, 2007,
Oregon Department of Agriculture