

The State of the State for Vineyard Farmworkers in the Walla Walla Valley:
How the Local Wine Industry Impacts Farmworkers' Health, Labor, and Housing
Needs

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The apparent invisibility of production is a form of social forgetting, a politics of glossing over the real social and economic relations that allow for our high standard of living. Considering the world of farm laborers presents a powerful corrective to a society easily enamored with its own self-serving myths. Still, it is Americans' deep rooted desire to believe in equality and the march of progress that makes farmworkers' situation so poignant, creating a discomfort born of our country's failure to live up to its own ideals."

*~ Daniel
Rothenberg*

I. INTRODUCTION

Death in the afternoon

The Seattle Times.

II. LITERARY CONTEXT

Wine is Not Applesauce: How Wine Production Differs From Other Mainstream Crops and Processed Foods

Economic Impact and Tourism

Prevailing Labor-Related Problems in the National Agricultural Industry

Health Issues and Access to Social Services

Wine.

The Economic Impacts of Washington Grapes and

any

Number of Reported Pesticide Illnesses in Top Ten Crops, 1991-2000

Crop/Site	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	Total
grapes	102	107	81	54	125	70	105	80	87	59	870
cotton	14	44	8	53	23	257	26	47	36	7	515
broccoli	115	63	2	6	80	41	2	4	2	24	339
oranges	4	52	9	63	26	11	74	15	14	21	289
soil ^b								12	189	21	222
almonds	18	15	36	10	8	15	28	8	17	45	200
ornamentals	23	25	14	12	23	7	6	17	9	23	159
lettuce	22	9	37	22	8	3	24	10	7	3	145
tomatoes	25	15	8	23	10	21	13	12	0	13	140
alfalfa	7	1	23	7	22	10	39	14	4	1	128
strawberries	14	22	16	7	5	14	4	2	7	14	105
pack/process ^c							5	5	53	36	99
Subtotal	344	353	234	257	330	449	321	221	372	231	3112
all other crops ^d	190	182	129	110	139	130	173	115	163	175	1506
no crop given	190	190	140	190	252	182	61	24	25	18	1272
Total	724	725	503	557	721	761	555	360	560	424	5890

never

Occupational Rights Violations

Income, Occupational Mobility, and Housing Quality

tourism

Gender Differences

public

Immigration Status

Farmworker Mobility: Changing Trends in Migration Patterns

Racial Dimension of Farm Work

**Median weekly earnings, by demographic characteristic
for full-time hired farmworkers, by citizenship status, 2006**

	Hired farmworkers			Wage and salary workers			Ratio
	Noncitizen	Citizen	Total	Noncitizen	Citizen	Total	
<i>Dollars</i>							
All workers	340	470	448	480	700	788	0.57
Sex							
Female	290	420	350	420	613	600	0.58
Male	350	480	400	490	794	750	0.53
Age distribution							
Between ages 15-21	280	350	312	340	355	350	0.89
Between ages 21-44	340	480	400	480	673	640	0.63
Over age 44	360	481	442	500	783	769	0.57
Hispanic ethnicity							
Hispanic	340	414	350	400	576	480	0.73
Non-Hispanic	360	481	475	680	720	720	0.66
Race							
White	340	485	400	440	728	692	0.58
Black	I/C	360	360	480	568	560	0.64
Native American	330	385	330	420	557	531	0.62
Asian	400	413	400	748	769	760	0.53

Farmworker Activism: What Are the Most Effective Ways to Address Farmworkers' Housing, Labor, and Health Needs?

Litigation, Policy Change, Community Activism, and Unions

Literary Summary

III. METHODOLOGY

IV. PRIMARY RESEARCH

How Does the Walla Walla Valley Wine Industry Compare to Washington's Broader Agricultural Industry?

All the people in Walla Walla who think wine making is really sexy will hate to hear me say this, but to a large degree wine-making is food processing. You're dealing with a raw agricultural product and you're processing it. In many respects it's no different from chopping up green beans and putting them in cans. You're taking a cultural product and putting it into a package to sell.⁶²

Another significant factor in determining market price for wine grapes and apples is the emphasis on sheer appearance. Unlike wine grapes, apples and cherries are

*their own final product. Tree fruit, like cherries and apples, are sold as they are picked from the branch and their value is directly dependent on the presumed quality based on the fruit's appearance on the supermarket shelf. Bruised apples and bruised cherries simply do not sell, "you bruise that cherry and forget about it, no one's going to buy it."*⁶³ *The same standard does not hold for wine grapes – they are all going to get crushed anyway – despite the stereotype that wine grapes need to be hand-picked with care to make the highest quality wines. In fact, some of the most expensive wine in the state is harvested by machine.*⁶⁴

They're not more supportive. I would say they are absent in many of the battles that we fight for the rights of workers, on either side. They're definitely not on our side saying we need better enforcement and to better protect farmworkers. They're not active members of the farm bureau, or in legislature saying we need to reduce worker's comp benefits for farmworkers. They've been absent... I'd say they're just different. More traditional agriculture tends to be more ingrained, when you've got multi-generational farmers that kind of give you a different perspective.⁶⁷

Orchards versus Vineyards in Washington State: Market Power and the Economy

I've seen 2 years where some apple farmers didn't harvest their apples. The quality of the fruit was excellent, and they didn't harvest it because the cost to harvest and put the apples in boxes was more than they would ever make on the fruit. They just abandoned the fruit in the field. It's a brutal market, laborers are sitting there with no work, with no job. They're standing there, looking at all these orchards with fruit on the branches and no one will pay them to pick it.⁷⁴

We have a smaller piece of an ever-enlarging pie. We get more people now – you can't begin to see all the wineries in a weekend even – so we get more people. But

*in the old days, if you got them they would go out with cases, now they're going out with bottles.*⁷⁹

Labor Conditions, Problems and Opportunities for Vineyard Farmworkers

Health Issues and Access to Social Services

Sometimes during harvest, you cut your hands with the scissors if you're cutting very quickly... but you can't hurt yourself too bad because the scissors are so short and serrated – they're not as sharp as normal ones. What often happens in apples is that you fall. When you arrive in the morning and the ladder is ready, sometimes one foot slips and you fall.⁸⁵

The worst is pruning, because your arms hurt a lot when the vines are old, so the cuts are harder. The other thing we don't like is cleaning under the plant because the branches sprout from the whole trunk and you have to be crouched down the whole time cutting everything. Crouching, crouching, crouching, you get really tired.⁸⁶

Occupational Rights Violations

I told him, “Here are the receipts.” He left and three days later I asked him about them, and he said, “I’m going to the office so that they pay you.” A week went by, two weeks, almost a month, and he says “It’s just that I forgot, it’ll be okay now, I’ll put some hours on your check so that you’re repaid.” “It’s fine,” I said, but he gave me the hours and then took some off my check again, so you don’t see what you’re being paid.”⁹⁸

Wage theft continues to be a big problem, not respecting a worker's rights to rest or lunch breaks, injuries. Washington has the second highest non-fatal injury rate of agriculture of any state in the nation. That's a huge problem. Then the workers get sucked into a bureaucracy they don't understand... generally they get chewed up and spit out of the worker's comp[ensation] system.¹⁰³

Income, Occupational Mobility, and Housing Quality

*I don't think so. He had worked at other farms and had so many years working there and they never gave him a position like this. When he [my husband] started, the boss was just starting his winery and after 4 years he gave him the position. He was the first to start working there and started to do everything, and the boss liked how he worked.*¹⁰⁵

single

I don't get a day off, I have to be here everyday, everyday. Not even Sunday. That's the hardest time because sometimes I need like a couple hours off and I can't take it, because I have to do the irrigation, the water has to be on, 24 hours a day. I work 10 and a half [hours a day]. Even my son – (*points out a photo on the wall*) – told me, “Tell your boss that if he doesn't give you a day off, you're going to quit your job.” And I go, “I can't quit, because that's how you eat.”¹⁰⁹

We've worked really hard these last 10 months in order to have money for the winter, because we don't work for the next 3 months. Our expenses are higher because we're in the house all the time, and the light costs a ton. It affects us a lot (to work so much) because we have almost no time with my son during the work season – we come home, eat dinner together, and go to sleep. Then we get up early again. We take him to wherever he is being taken care of and that's it. It's difficult. And he's had problems talking, he didn't want to talk, he just barely started. He's lonely, but we have to work.¹¹²

Many of the second-in-command people in companies that I have seen up and down the Yakima valley – some of the finest quality vineyards – have Mexican-Americans as the field directors, the day-to-day operations directors. There's real upward mobility there, [but] in terms of moving to that upper stage of ownership, I'm not seeing that as much.¹¹⁴

Apple growers have always had the expectation placed on them...to house their employees, to be able provide x, y, and z for their employees because they're seasonal laborers and they have high needs...I've never heard that same question posed to wine grape growers. Here we have a major industry, the wine industry, that's generally gotten a free pass because I don't think people question where their wines come from, and not to imply that there's wrongdoing going on, but the fact that it's a multibillion dollar industry coming out of Washington state and to not understand that dynamic...¹¹⁶

Gender Differences

“

I like the grapes better because the work is easy to do, but it's careful, it has its way to be done. You have to be very careful with the shoots. [Women] like details more, and in grapes there are a lot of details to keep in mind. I like it more because you're not doing everything like crazy trying to see who can do it better. It's calmer. They don't pressure us. We're on the ground all the time, walking. We don't get as tired as in the apples.

We're two teams, one is just women. My boss likes things well done, and in grapes you're not just hacking. You have to count the buds to know how many will grow, how much they will produce. The men do everything faster, and the work isn't that important to them, sometimes they hurt the plant, cut too much, or leave too much. So they send us [women] to go through a second time. We're in charge of the final cuts – the men do the first pass and we do the second.¹²⁸

You have to look where you can, sometimes a friend, sometimes a brother, I'm always worrying about it... When the school at the migrant program was open,¹³³ we'd leave him there, and they kept him all day and taught him, but it closed. This year we were starting earlier, and then during the harvest... It was a battle. There is a government program and they provide aid, but since [my son] is not naturalized, he doesn't qualify. If I bring him there without the aid, it's very expensive. So I always try to look for relatives or friends to take care of him – they don't charge as much.¹³⁴

Immigration Status

I had a good friend who was an illegal alien. He worked his way up with a disguised identity that lasted for 7 years. A real social security number and a real name attached to that social security number... He did great and worked up in the wine business like I did, very swiftly. He was director of the vineyard he was

working at until his identity was revealed...the owners couldn't take the liability of someone at that stage. He was a known illegal alien... there's no recourse for someone in that position who unfortunately had no schooling, but was one of the best vineyard managers in the business. It was a very eye opening experience for me because I was driving a car with him and we were talking about life. He waved at everybody harvesting onions in this field and he said, "You know, they're all illegal, my friend, all of them. Those guys don't have any papers. If they had papers they wouldn't do that." It was interesting to see how many people are illegal aliens... America's been built on people moving over here legally or illegally – either way. It felt very unfortunate... and bizarre that someone as smart, adept, and capable of advancement as he was, was given no recourse to remain.¹⁴¹

Farmworker Mobility ðWhere Do They Come From and Where Do They Go?

There's definitely been a trend away from seasonal workers towards what I call the nearly year-round worker. A vineyard will struggle to find work for key employees for 9-10 months a year, so you're trying to monkey with mother nature, 6 months of employment and trying to stretch it out to 9 months. You get these big companies that plant from Tri-cities up into Okanogan, from sea level up to 10,000 feet... to try and stretch your grape harvest. Different varietal wines, ice wines, for example, you harvest really late. Scientists are messing around with the crop... trying to move away from a predominantly seasonal workforce to a more year-round workforce.¹⁴⁹

If you talk to them, they'd tell you they like working here. They feel secure. That's another thing that's changed... They're all established people here, they're not the seasonal ones, there's a few. How you get those seasonal people is with these people – they know them, they got a brother, a cousin... It used to be with the seasonal help, they just came in, they did it, and they were gone. But not anymore, they have families, they have house payments. It's really become more that they need that pretty much year-round income, and that's where the vineyard and the apples really help us... because if we're not busy in our apple deal, we can shuttle people over here and do [wine grapes].¹⁵¹

Racial Dimension of Farm Work in Washington State

You don't see white people do field work, they just don't. I can honestly tell you, it might sound prejudice, I wouldn't hire a white person to work... because, they just don't – I mean as far as field work – they are not motivated enough to do it. I hate to say that, but that's what it's come to. We – our race – they don't work like this. It's really sad that it's come that way, but it's true.¹⁵⁶

It's funny because we have a French intern and his English is certainly a lot worse than theirs is, but he has noticed that when tourists have questions when they're on the line working, they will ask him. And he's like, I'm the intern, the new guy, you need to ask Rafa – the cellar master. It's still kind of interesting, the attitude... I think it really struck him as being weird that they're asking him because he's Anglo...It's kind of sobering that that attitude is still out there.¹⁵⁸

People don't want to be migrant workers...They want to have the opportunities right there, where they live, 12 months a year. What every human being wants is to wake up in the morning, go to Starbucks and get their coffee. They want to go to work, they want to get paid a good wage regardless of what they produce and they want to come home and drink beer and watch football games. That's what people strive to do. That's what immigrants are striving to do, but it takes them a

*couple generations to get there. While they're doing that, they are willing to take the jobs that other people don't want to do. So they're willing to work harder.*¹⁶⁰

*Another very serious issue that we have yet to overcome is race. The overwhelming majority of farmers in this region are white and the overwhelming majority of the workers are not. I don't think it's coincidental that the rules and regulations in place to protect farmworkers are substandard. I think that if it were primarily white folks out there doing this work, we'd think a little bit harder about excluding folks from overtime or allowing them adequate housing, some of the second class stuff that we subject immigrant workers too.*¹⁶³

Local Initiatives to Address These Needs: Where Has Activism Successfully Bettered Washington State Farmworker's Lives and What Still Needs to be Addressed?

Broetje Orchards

United Farm Workers

It was on the forefront, and then one of the lead union workers at the winery was the lead plaintiff in suing the state of Washington for failing to adopt this testing

*protocol to protect workers, and won. That's why the state of Washington became the second state in the country to have this medical monitoring of pesticide applicators... We're very proud of the progress we've made working together with Sainte Michelle.*¹⁶⁸

Economic Challenges in Walla Walla

How Does the Walla Walla Valley Wine Industry Impact the Local Agriculture Community?

Provides Diversified and More Stable Work for Farmworkers in Other Crops

One thing that will kill you in the farming industry is to have to create work, just to keep them busy... If I'm going to keep them busy, I want them making money, but I want to be making money too. I don't want to be just keeping them busy and costing me, because there's just not that kind of margins in any kind of business.¹⁸⁹

Competition for Farmworkers in Other Crops

You can't believe how much it's changed in the past year, since the economy went bad. The grape industry has been good and bad... We were looking at it as bad from an apple grower's standpoint because they were taking our people, but if you can implement it to all work together, like I am... I've got a crew that I can keep busy doing both sides of that. That's the key. But up until the economy went

*bad, there was a real shortage of people. The reason there isn't now isn't because the grape industry has died, but that the trailer manufacturers in Pendleton aren't there anymore... We were all worried, thinking there's not enough people to go around, but this year there has been a huge amount of excess help.*¹⁹⁰

The Uncertain Future for Washington Agriculture

*We talk about future flow, what's going to happen for labor-intensive agriculture in the US. Suppose you can click your fingers and legalize all the illegal people that are here right now and then say "We've created a system where there will be no more illegal people, no more unauthorized immigration," you would need to either increase wages to workers to a point where we could compete with other seasonal manual work forces in the country – which I don't think is feasible, or we could lose all labor intensive agriculture either by mechanizing or growing somewhere else, like what is happening in many other crops OR we could develop a program to bring workers here. That would be extremely attractive to us because these are people that want to come here. They want to come here and work, some of them want to immigrate here and others of them want to come here, work, and then go home.*¹⁹¹

V. CONCLUSIONS

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Purchase Local Fruits and Vegetables
Problem: Job Insecurity for Farmworkers
Actor: Consumers

potentially

directly

Do Not Exempt Farmworkers from the Food Quality Protection Act/Instate Mandatory Cholinesterase for Farmworkers That Work With Pesticides

Problem: Pesticide Exposure

Actor: Federal Government

Do Not Exempt Farmworkers from the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act

Problem: Excessive Working Hours

Actor: Federal Government

Incorporate Vineyard and Winery Management Skills for Farmworkers to Viticulture Program

Problem: Limited Upward Mobility Options for Farmworkers

Actor: Walla Walla Community College Viticulture Program (applicable to community colleges in all agricultural regions)

Provide Structures That Provide Shade and Drinking Water on Farms and Vineyards

Problem: Heat Exposure

Actor: Growers

Comprehensive immigration reform

Problem: Job Insecurity and Rights Violations

Actor: Federal Government

Facilitate Unionizing Efforts on Farms and Vineyard of All Production Sizes

Problem: Labor Rights Violations/Fear to Report Abuses

Actor: Unions, Advocacy Groups, Universities, NGOs

Reinstate Federal Agricultural Price Supports for Labor-Intensive Crops

Problem: Unpredictable Weather Conditions/Small Profit Margin for Growers

Actor: Federal Government

Provide Infrastructure Where Farmworkers Can Confidentially Report Labor Rights Violations

Problem: Fear to Report Abuses (Particularly for Undocumented Farmworkers)

Actor: Unions/Local Labor and Latino Rights Groups

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old farm worker in Washington State*

- Can you tell me how your got your job at this winery or vineyard?

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- Where did you work before the vineyards

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- What kinds of specific tasks do you do in the vineyards?

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- How does vineyard work vary for men and women?

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- How do you feel about your overall health?

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- Can you tell me about a time you have been injured at work in a vineyard?

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- What kind of home do you have and where is it located?

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•Can you tell me about the wages and benefits you get working here?

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•What do you think is good about being in a union? What is not so good?

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•Have you ever used social services? Why or why not?

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•What do you do when you are not working?

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•Can you tell me about your family life?

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APPENDIX B ÐInterview Questions for Farmworkers in the Wine Industry Ð
Spanish

- ¿Cómo llegó a trabajar en esta viña?
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- ¿En dónde trabajó antes de aquí?
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 -
 -
- ¿Cuáles son las tareas específicas que hace en las viñas?
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 -
 -
 -
- ¿Cómo es distinto el trabajo en las viñas para las mujeres y los hombres?
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 -
 -
- ¿Cómo se siente sobre su salud en general?
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 -
 -
- ¿Me podría contar sobre un tiempo cuando le ha sido lastimado en una viña?
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- ¿Qué tipo de hogar tiene, y dónde está ubicado?
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- ¿Me podr'a contar sobre su sueldo y los beneficios que recibe act?
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-
-
- ¿Que piensa es lo bueno de las uniones? ¿Que es lo malo?
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-
- ¿Ha usado los servicios sociales?
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- ¿QuŽ haces cuando no estŕ trabajando?
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- ¿Me podr'a contar sobre su vida familiar?
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APENDIX C Interview Questions for Erik Nicholson, United Farm Workers

- How did you get involved at UFW?

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do?

- What's going on with UFW's activism?

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- Have there been any communities that were successful in organizing?

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- What is your general impression of the Washington wine industry and wine grape growers?

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- How and why is the UFW particularly involved with the wine grape industry in Washington?

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- Who might you recommend to talk in more detail about particularities of the wine grape industry? Growers? Farm workers?

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APPENDIX D - Interview Questions for Growers

- What kinds of characteristics have you observed in the ag industry
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- What do you think are the main labor needs for farm workers?
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- Are you familiar at all with the Walla Walla CC Enology and Viticulture Program?
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- How do you feel about the overall health of farm workers?
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- What is your impression of what workers do when they are injured?
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 -
- Where do most farm workers live?
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- Can you tell me about the wages and benefits you provide for your farmworkers?
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- Do they ever use social services?
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- Can you tell me about their family lives?
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APPENDIX E Interviews

APPENDIX F – Economic Impact of Washington Wine, Grapes, and Grape Juice Products

WASHINGTON WINE, GRAPES AND GRAPE JUICE PRODUCTS	1999 ECONOMIC IMPACT	2006 ECONOMIC IMPACT
Number of Wineries	160+	534
Number of Farm Entities	250+	325
Washington Winery Revenues	\$289 million	\$436 million
Farm Gate Value of Grapes	\$127 million	\$144 million
Grape Bearing Acres	54 thousand	57 thousand
Grape Juice Production Value	N/A	\$470 million
Wages Paid	\$227 million	\$579 million in WA \$850 million in US
Wine-Related Tourism Expenditures	\$18.9 million	\$237.6 million
Number of Wine Related Tourists	350 thousand	1.7 million
Taxes Paid in Washington	\$72.6 million	\$145.2 million WA \$196.9 million Fed
Taxes Paid in Other States	N/A	\$57.5 million State \$71.8 million Fed

The Economic Impacts of Washington Grapes and

Wine.

APPENDIX G – Washington State’s Active Vineyard Regions



The Economic Impacts of Washington Grapes and Wine.