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Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Forum and Trade Show

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Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Forum and Trade Show
Holiday Inn and Convention Center
110 Second Ave., Kearney, Nebr.
1 p.m. Friday, Feb. 29, 2008
John C. Owens, NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this 11th annual Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Forum and Trade Show. I'm John Owens, University of Nebraska Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. I'm delighted to be with you on this ~~first~~ ^{second} day of a very fine and informative conference.

It is through innovation, dedication, and just plain old-fashioned hard work that today we use the words "Nebraska" and "wine industry" together. Yet as you folks already know, wine-making in Nebraska clearly is not entirely new. Early settlers to the Nebraska Territory brought fruit trees and grapevine cuttings with them. These supplemented wild grapes growing in the Territory's river valleys, and by the turn of the late 19th century, Nebraska's 5,000 acres of grapes fed a small, but flourishing, grape and wine industry.

Prohibition, then the Great Depression changed all that, and it wasn't until the mid-1980s, when the Nebraska Farm Wineries Act went into effect, that we again started thinking of grapes as a Nebraska enterprise.

During the 1980s the University of Nebraska-Lincoln began vigorously pursuing cultivar trials of grapes on its campus. This work provided the foundation for valued information and techniques for interested grape growers, many of whom read, studied, and experimented with great diligence. Such innovation led to Nebraska's first post-Prohibition winery, Cuthills Vineyard Winery, which opened in late 1994 in northeast Nebraska near Pierce. The industry began growing and in 1997 Nebraska legislation was passed to allow for intrastate and interstate shipment of Nebraska wines, as well as for wine consumption directly on the wine-making premises.

Today Nebraska boasts nearly two dozen wineries and more than 500 acres of grapes. It's wonderful to see such innovation and creativity in our state.

The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is helping advance this industry, and others, for a more profitable Nebraska. That's what land-grant universities do -- we bring the resources of the university to Nebraskans. Last year an independent study found the Institute provides Nebraskans a 15-to-1 return on each state tax dollar invested with us. The study reported that not only is IANR an innovation engine for the state, we also work to enhance and sustain entrepreneurship and quality-of life.

Dr. Paul Read is director of the Nebraska Viticulture Program within the Institute, and assisted by research technologist Steve Gamet, Paul is the principal investigator for this Nebraska Agricultural Research Division research project. Dr. Read has developed an informative and flavorful forum for you here, with opportunities to taste the award-winning wines that are the fruit of Nebraska research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and labor.

We welcome all the speakers at this Forum and Trade Show, which include our guest presenters from The Ohio State University: enologist Dr. Todd Steiner, and plant pathologist Dr. Mike Ellis. Thank you for coming, and enjoy your stay. Institute presenters during the forum include UNL Extension Educators Dr. Connie Reimers-Hild, Dr. Jim Russkosi, ^{- and} Jim Schild, as well as Dr. Don Rundquist, a faculty member in the School of Natural Resources. I know they will have innovative ideas you can take home and put to use.

I wish to thank everyone who worked so hard to put this event together, and I thank each of you as participants for coming. Again, welcome to the 11th annual Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Forum and Trade Show. It looks fact-filled and exciting. Thank you.

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