

Grape growers learn about opportunities Kansas

MANHATTAN — Greg Shipe had a fateful day back in 1969 - the kind of day that determines the course of a lifetime.

For Shipe, that day came when he was serving in the Navy and stationed in Vietnam. He received word from home that his grandmother was planning to sell her farm near Eudora, in northeast Kansas.

His reaction might seem a little surprising, given that he was born in Chicago and raised in Dodge City, Kan. - far from the land that his grandparents farmed. But Shipe, a self-described "city kid," contacted his grandmother and urged her not to sell - rather to wait until he came home from overseas.

That decision resulted in what is now the 150-acre Davenport Orchard, Vineyard and Winery, which produces 15 varieties of grapes and 30 different wines, as well as peaches, apples and pears.

"I would love to plant it all to grapes," said Shipe, who was a presenter at the recent Kansas Grape Growing Seminar in Manhattan. He and his wife, Charlee, have 13 acres devoted to grapes.

The seminar was sponsored by Kansas State University Research and Extension and the Kansas Department of Commerce.

Shipe joined others who ranged from rookie grape growers to veteran viticulturists in exploring further opportunities for grape growing and winemaking in Kansas.

And opportunities abound, according to Janna Dunbar of the Kansas Department of Commerce. A survey of the 13 wineries currently operating in Kansas indicated that the state needs at least 100 more acres planted to grapes in the next five years.

That may not sound like much acreage to wheat and corn growers, whose crops sometimes spread over hundreds of acres, but the average size vineyard in Kansas is about five acres, according to Shipe, who is the president of the Kansas Viticulture and Farm Winery Association. That's partly because of greater startup costs and yields per acre.

"An acre of grapes can yield from 2,000 to 8,000 pounds or more and can sell for \$0.25 to \$0.50 per pound. That means an acre of grapes can be worth \$500 to \$4,000," he said.

Determining the site on which to

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Greg Shipe, Kansas Viticulture and Farm Winery Assoc.

start a vineyard and selecting the cultivars to grow are the most important first steps, according to Kansas State University assistant professor of horticulture, Sorkel Kadir.

Her research at K-State's Research Vineyard at the university's Wichita Research Center identifies grape cultivars suited for Kansas.

"If you don't do it (site selection and preparation) right, it's like preparing to run a race by shooting yourself in the foot," said Andy Allen, with the Mid-America Viticulture and Enology Center at Missouri State University-Mountain Grove.

"Grape vines don't really produce until they're three years old and don't reach maximum fruit production until they're four years old, but they can live up to 40 to 50

years," Kadir said, adding that most vines will produce at least 25 to 30 years if managed properly.

For maximum yields, grape vines like a soil pH of 6 to 6.5 best, but vines will grow under different conditions, even after much of the plant is killed by an unseasonable freeze.

"Grape vine is just like a weed - it will almost always come back again," Kadir said.

Deciding on the right type of trellis to support the particular type of grapes to be grown is another key decision that needs to be made up front, Allen said. Some trellis systems are more expensive to build than others. Some lend themselves to mechanical harvesting while others work better for manual harvest.

State has history of grapes, wine

MANHATTAN — Even with the recent flurry of interest in grape growing and winemaking in Kansas, it may take awhile for the state to get back to its once prominent place in winemaking history. Here are some facts about grape growing and winemaking in Kansas, according to the Kansas Department of Commerce:

- 1880 - Kansas became the first state to outlaw the manufacture and sale of alcohol through a constitutional amendment. Over time, vineyards became non-existent.

- 1901 - 5,668 acres of grapes were still being produced.

- 1919 - 18th amendment beginning National Prohibition was

passed.

- 1933 - National Prohibition ended, but Kansas did not allow wineries until 1985 with the passage of the Farm Winery Act.

- 2004 - Kansas wineries had nearly \$1.2 million in sales, with the industry employing 42 full-time workers and 67 part-time employees with a payroll of nearly \$1 million. Many vineyards rely on volunteer labor for pruning and harvesting.

- 2005 - 170 acres of grapes were grown in Kansas.

- 2005 - 13 Kansas wineries produced 50,000 gallons of wine. Six of the wineries opened within the past year.

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Meth users use ID theft

RIVERSIDE, Calif. (AP) — Stealing mail. Digging through trash. Days spent in front of a computer trying to unlock financial information.

All to score methamphetamine. Authorities are discovering that more and more desperate users of the drug are turning to identity theft to pay for their habit, creating a criminal nexus costing Americans millions of dollars.

The trend is sweeping the West and spreading to other parts of the country, with one hub of activity in the garages and trailer parks of Riverside and San Bernardino counties on the fringe of suburban Los Angeles.

The region was the site of a third of California's nearly 500 meth lab busts in 2004 and is home to the second-highest number of identity theft victims in the nation.

"It's been said the two crimes go together like rats and garbage," said Jack Lucky, a Riverside County prosecutor who nearly became a victim of ID theft himself before his personal information was found at a meth lab.

The connection is posing a major challenge for authorities, who until recently tended to overlook or neglect identity theft evidence at meth labs in favor of pursuing drug charges that are easier to prove and carry stiffer penalties.

"We weren't educated or sophisticated enough to spot what they were doing," said Riverside County sheriff's Sgt. Steve Koller, a narcotics task force member. "It's taken us a while to catch up."

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., has called on the Department of Justice to study the link further and recommend tougher penalties for those convicted of both crimes.

"What we are probably going to find is that there is a stronger connection than we know right now," she said.

No figures were available on just how much the link is costing consumers. Separately, however, meth use and identity theft have each taken their toll.

Nearly 10 million Americans fell victim last year to identity theft, costing \$5 billion. Meanwhile, the popularity of methamphetamine has grown, with an estimated 12 million people trying it at least once.

Police said meth users — known as "cranksters" — are drawn to identity theft because they can stay up for days scanning computer records or go "Dumpster diving" for discarded financial information.

A drug dealer recently provided fake identities to a woman in Phoenix who allegedly used them to buy cell phones. She was paid with methamphetamine, and the phones were later used by some of the dealer's associates, authorities said.

Last summer, Georgia authorities tracked at least 20 thieves — known as the "Mailbox Meth Gang" — who cruised housing subdivisions looking for raised flags on mailboxes that could yield checks and bank statements to exchange for meth. Investigators found 14,000 credit card numbers in a laptop

computer seized from the gang.

Police said the thieves typically do not target one spot too long and often divide tasks, with different persons stealing the identity, converting it and then using it.

Alameda police Sgt. Anthony Munoz said as many as 85 percent of the identity theft cases he investigates have a connection to methamphetamine use.

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