

Sunday, August 5, 2001

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Babcock wines new to Michigan

Have you ever enjoyed wines from southern California? How about the Santa Barbara area? Too warm you say? Let's talk geography. Most mountain ranges in California run north-south, but the mountain range that creates the Santa Ynez Valley, in Santa Barbara County, runs west to east from the Pacific Ocean. This means that the marine influence creates a cool climate at the western end. Vineyards further inland get gradually warmer.

Cool climate varieties such as pinot noir are favored at the western end of the Santa Ynez Valley, while the eastern end is warm enough to grow Bordeaux varieties. All of the preceding is important because we'd like to introduce you to the wines of Babcock Winery and Vineyards, made in Santa Barbara and new to Michigan.

Bryan Babcock uses the myriad climates and exposures of the Santa Ynez Valley to produce the grapes needed to make great wines. He describes what he does for each.

The 2000 Babcock Eleven Oaks Sauvignon Blanc \$22.50 is an assertive style without being aggressively grassy. It is a bright, refreshing summer white with a mineral note that is quite unique and pleasant. A complex glass of white wine.

Wine Picks
Readers requested more red wines to match grilled salmon, tuna, swordfish and others with firm flesh. First up is pinot noir.

■ **Dynamite:** 1999 Archery Summit Arcus Estate Pinot Noir \$75. Expensive, yes, but so are the don't sup it; share it among four wine lover friends. If you can't spring for our first suggestion, go for a great second: 1999 Archery Summit Oregon Premier Cuvée Pinot Noir \$42, not as full as Arcus, but undeniably decadent. ■ **Best pinot noir** bets under \$20: 1999 Buena Vista Cuvée \$10 and 1999 Rodney Strong Russian River Valley \$18. ■ **Other than pinot noir:** 1998 Foppiano Petite Sirah, Sonoma County \$20 makes a great grilled fish pairing as does 1997 Margaux de Cuvée \$12 from Spain.

French oak. Babcock said that some of the fruit came from a location, not open to the ocean and therefore slightly warmer. These grapes produced effusive tropical characteristics, while the fruit from another warm, eastern vineyard gave flower petals and citrus notes. A vineyard nearer the ocean contributed delicious apple aromas and flavors while the estate vineyard yielded spice, citrus, mineral notes and crisp acid.

The 1999 Babcock Grand Cuvée Chardonnay Estate Grown \$26 is a sensationally seamless wine with incredible balance. All elements are in harmony.

"With all of the great chardonnays in the market today," Babcock emphasized, "we need great farming, great winemaking, and a great vineyard to compete. We practice an integrated method of determining what the vines need and respond to those needs as quickly as possible. This means more effort and the financial risk is greater, but it is the only way to produce world class fruit."

The 1999 Babcock Eleven Oaks Sangiovese \$40 is a superb wine from a very difficult-to-grow variety. It took Babcock 15 minutes to illustrate to a grower how to prune a sangiovese vine for low yield. After he finished, the grower said, "I have a 1,000 more

Please see WINE, D2

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Simplify your eating
- 2 Unique

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SUMMER

From the garden to the kitchen, there's nothing as good as a sun-kissed tomato

BY MIKE MURPHY
SPECIAL WRITER

Whether you say to-may-to or to-mah-to makes little difference. Fact is, millions of the freshest of those tasty summer favorites will be rolling into area farmers' markets and produce departments and onto kitchen tables in the coming weeks.

What to do with them doesn't take much imagination. You can throw them in salads or drop them in sauces. Slice 'em and dice 'em for now, or freeze 'em or can 'em for later.

Or, salt shaker in hand, you can take the deep plunge and bite into a whole one.

They taste good and they're good for you.

A list of famous tomato lovers would roll off these pages. A couple though, are notable: Thomas Jefferson and Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, whose "Ode to the Tomato" includes these delicious lines of verse:

the tomato,
star of earth, recurrent
star,
displays
its canals,
its remarkable amplitude and abundance,
no pit,
no husk,
no leaves or thorns,
the tomato offers
its gift
of fiery color
and cool completeness.

Now the most widely grown "fruit" or "vegetable" in the United States, the tomato took awhile to catch on in the United States and Europe.

Packed with vitamins

The "love apple," as the tomato came to be known to Europeans first introduced to the productive plant by the Incas of South America, was once thought to be poisonous because of its membership in the nightshade family of plants.

Now, of course, most of us know that's not the case. To the contrary, tomatoes are packed with Vitamin C, fiber and Vitamin A in the form of health promoting beta-carotene.

Of special interest to men, the deep red tones of the tomato are an indication of the presence of lycopene, which medical experts believe may play a role in fighting cancer, especially prostate cancer.

As far as the fruit or vegetable debate goes, though, it depends who you talk to. The Internet Shrine to the Tomato, an actual Web site, argues that tomatoes are fruit since they represent the maturation of a flowering plant and contain seeds. But they're not the only ones with a say in the matter.

"We consider it a vegetable," said Dave Smith, executive director of the Michigan Vegetable Council. "Some people consider it a fruit because the edible part is the fruit of the plant. That's a good coffee shop argument, I guess."

Smith said that this year's Michigan

tomato crop has the potential to be a good one, but added that cool weather in May and the hot, dry weather of July might translate into a crop that will arrive a little later than usual.

Tomatoes impact markets

Hannah Stevens, a horticultural agent for Michigan State University Extension Services, is in agreement. Stevens said that locally grown tomatoes are coming late, but coming nevertheless. Once they do, she said, area supermarkets will feel the pinch.

"It's the one garden crop that seriously impacts supermarket produce sections," Stevens said. "They taste so much better than what supermarkets carry that supermarkets don't even attempt to compete with them."

Stevens said the reason for the taste difference between store bought and locally produced tomatoes has to do with refrigeration.

Much of the produce available in supermarkets is cooled during shipment and temperatures below 50°F can ruin a tomato's rich flavor. Large commercial farms also pick tomatoes when they're green and let them ripen during shipping, Stevens said.

"Most home growers are smarter than that, though," Stevens said.

According to Stevens, the most common mistake home growers make is in picking their tomatoes too late.

"Believe it or not, a tomato can be picked when it shows its first blush of pink," said Stevens, who instructs growers to let the tomatoes ripen for a couple of days in a dark, warm area.

"They're going to be very tasty, and firmer," she said.

Selecting them

Tomato pickers should choose a firm, ripe tomato without blemishes and the tomato should give slightly to gentle palm pressure. They should be stored for only a day or two. Tomatoes should not be refrigerated or set in the sun.

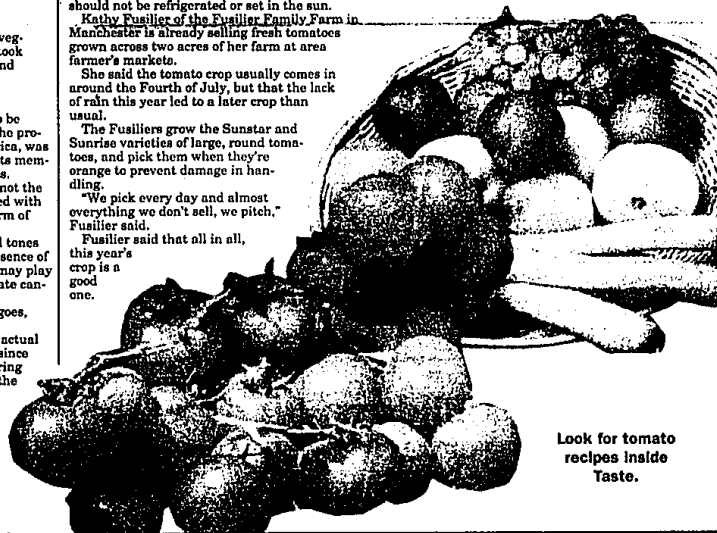
Kathy Fusilier of the Fusilier Family Farm in Manchester is already selling fresh tomatoes grown across two acres of her farm at area farmer's markets.

She said the tomato crop usually comes in around the Fourth of July, but that the lack of rain this year led to a later crop than usual.

The Fusiliers grow the Sunstar and Sunrise varieties of large, round tomatoes, and pick them when they're orange to prevent damage in handling.

"We pick every day and almost everything we don't sell, we pitch," Fusilier said.

Fusilier said that all in all, this year's crop is a good one.



Look for tomato recipes inside Taste.

Please see TOMATOES, D2

Business is booming for organic growers

LIVING BETTER HEALTHIER



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Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments of United States agriculture in the last decade. In 1999 organic food sales were estimated at approximately \$6 billion. The number of organic farmers is increasing on an average of about 12 percent per year.

Late last year Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced national standards for the production, handling, and processing of organically grown agricultural products, making them the strongest, most comprehensive standards in the world.

What is organically grown food? Organic foods are grown and harvested on farms that do not use any fertilizers containing synthetic ingredients or any commercially blended fertilizers con-

taining natural poisons such as arsenic or lead salts. The use of nitrogen, sulfites, or heavy metals is prohibited, along with the use of any packaging materials or storage containers that contain synthetic fungicides, preservatives or fumigants.

Meeting standards

Organic farms must meet the following standards: All products labeled organic must originate from farms or handling operations certified by a state or private agency accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, except farms that sell less than \$5,000 worth per year of organic agricultural products. They cannot use genetic engineering methods, irradiation or sewage sludge for fertilization to be classified as "organic."

What are the health benefits of eating organic foods? Kim Lifton of Huntington Woods doesn't eat organic foods exclusively. "But I started adding fresher foods - organic, flax seed meal,

and I have a lot of added energy," Lifton said.

Organic farms... cannot use genetic engineering methods, irradiation or sewage sludge for fertilization to be classified as "organic."

kashi cereal, granola - to my diet in May," Lifton said. "I did so because I felt sick from all of the processed foods in my diet. I had been eating processed cereal, breads that were not whole wheat, artificial sweeteners, canned fruits and frozen vegetables." She finally consulted with a registered dietitian.

"All she had to say was time to eat organic, and she knew I would listen," Lifton said.

Today, Lifton is down 10 pounds from eating healthier foods. Although everything she eats is not organic, her choices are much healthier, including whole grains and lots of fresh vegetables. "I feel like I am 10 years younger, feel very good about my self,

and I have a lot of added energy," Lifton said.

Where to buy

Where can you purchase organic foods? Surprisingly, many full-service grocery stores are carrying a wide-variety of organic foods along with specialty grocery stores and health food stores. Some neighborhoods organize "co-ops" to purchase organic foods, therefore saving money through a buying group which delivers right to your doorstep.

Is "natural" food the same as "organic"? Just because something is natural does not mean it's organic. Natural could mean that a fruit drink is made from fruit, but that still doesn't mean that the drink is made from fruit grown on an organic farm. The term is used very loosely.

Beverly Price is a registered dietitian and exercise physiologist. Look for her column on the first Sunday of each month in Taste. See recipes inside.

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