



For Immediate Release:
July 10, 2011

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Arizona Wine Industry Booming

Popularity, wineries continue to soar as industry grows

PHOENIX – The California wine industry is still king, but other states including Arizona are making considerable economic gains. Young adults as well as baby boomers are becoming wine lovers, expanding the industry’s base of consumers – and ending the days when the wine industry was dominated by the ‘snob’ wine collector.

In Arizona, rock stars like Maynard James Keenan of the popular band Tool and award-winning New Zealand and American filmmaker Sam Pillsbury (*The Quiet Earth, Free Willy 3*) have made the wine industry approachable to a whole new generation of wine lovers.

In 2004 there were less than 10 wineries in Arizona. Today there are more than 50, and many more are in the development phase, according to the Arizona Wine Growers Association (AWGA), the state’s trade association.

“The number of vineyard acres has already grown dramatically, plus many new vineyards and wineries are on the way,” said Peggy Fiandaca, AWGA President and owner of Lawrence Dunham Vineyards. “The wine industry generates jobs and boosts tax revenue, exports and tourism.”

In fact, the wine industry is one of the only value-added industries in Arizona seeing substantial gains. According to Wine America, a national wine industry trade association promoting advancement and advocacy of sound public policy, “grapes are the highest value fruit crop in the nation and the sixth-largest crop overall. Grapes account for about 30% of the value of all fruits grown in the U.S.”

The industry enjoys three established grape growing regions in Arizona – Sonoita/Elgin in Santa Cruz County, the Greater Willcox region in Cochise County, and the Verde Valley in Yavapai County. There also are vineyards or wineries in Pima, Graham, Mohave, and Gila counties, plus several urban wineries in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The majority of the vineyard acreage in Arizona is in Cochise County.

“Arizona is becoming more and more urbanized and the value of agriculture and its potential to strengthen the state’s economy is under appreciated. We’re trying to change that,” Fiandaca said. “Specialty crops like wine grapes are transforming Arizona’s agriculture from traditional heavy water users to low water use crops. Millions of people visit wineries annually in the U.S. for the unique



experience and spend considerably on each visit. You know, very few people go to watch cotton grow or to see an electrical component being built.”

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About the Arizona Wine Growers Association (AWGA)

The AWGA serves grape growers and winemakers in Arizona, allying its members for representation, promotion and education. The association strives to advance with integrity the sustainable growth and production of authentic Arizona-grown wines.

Arizona has over 50 licensed and bonded wineries. Several Arizona wines have been served in the White House, and more than 20 wines from eight Arizona wineries have scored at least an 88 rating from *Wine Spectator*. In a recent blind taste test featuring several high-profile judges, Arizona wines beat out noted wines from around the world, grabbing three of the top five spots in both the red and white competitions. Arizona wines also took first place for both red and white. For more information visit www.ArizonaWine.org.