Mid-Columbia Agricultural Hall of Fame Nomination packet

Name of Nominee:

Gary Scrimsher

Nominator:

Michael Scrimsher, son

Date Nov 29, 2012

Mid-Columbia Agricultural Hall of Fame Nomination packet

Name of Nominee: Gary Scrimsher

Nominator: Michael Scrimsher, son

Date Nov 29, 2012

The Mid-Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame was formed in Year 2000 to recognize and honor distinguished individuals that have made significant contributions to the agricultural community in the Greater Franklin County region and its immediate surrounding areas; although nominees from neighboring counties of Franklin County within a 150-mile radius are often also considered for this prestigious award.

The Pasco Chamber Board has proudly created a Selection Committee comprised of quality individuals representative of our agriculture industry and has chartered them with the honorable task of reviewing all nomination submittals. Induction candidates are selected based on their outstanding performance in the agriculture industry and their bountiful support of the local and rural communities. Candidates are recognized by their peers for not only their dedication, generosity, and selflessness, but also their demonstrated achievements, noteworthy expertise, and creative innovations that often provide a legacy of impactful results and lasting benefit to the overall enhancement of the local agricultural industry and community at large. Farmers, growers, ranchers, and owners/employees of agribusiness firms are all eligible for nomination as either individuals and/or families.

The Ag Hall of Fame inductions will be presented at a special gala January 17, 2013 at the Pasco Red Lion. ***Deadline for Application is November 30, 2012.***

Mid Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame Intent to Nominate

Nominee's Name: Gary Scrimsher

Mailing Address: 6819 W 20th Ave. Kennewick WA 99338

Nominee's Phone _____ Fax _____ E-Mail _____

Date of Birth Dec 31, 1937 Birthplace: Pasco WA

Date of Death (if deceased) NA – Still living

Nominator's Name : Michael Scrimsher, son of Gary

Phone 509-531-6125 E-Mail: Michael.Scrimsher@areva.com

Family Contact: Same as nominator

Note: I have kept this nomination from Gary. He has no idea of this. Please read the bio for more info.

Brief Bio for Gary Scrimsher:

Gary was born in Pasco on Dec 31, 1937. At the time, his family lived in what was then the White Bluffs community. ary's dad had worked hard to provide his family a living through the depression. Years later a man approached Gary and said. "You don't know me, but I knew your dad in the days at White Bluffs." He continued: "Your dad worked his heart out raising hogs and vegetables in the 30's. As people didn't have $$ to buy during the bottom of the great depression, he gave much of it away to those in worse shape than himself." The example of Gary's dad, born in 1889 and was 48 years old when Gary was born, and watching his dad work his whole life greatly influenced Gary's work ethic.

In March of 1943, when Gary was 6 years old, the Gov. agents came and gave everyone in the townships of White Bluffs and Hanford their 30 day notice and depression era land value prices. Their farm land was then re-appropriated for the Hanford Engineering works.

At that time, Gary's family moved to Proseer WA where he finished high school in 1958 and married his H.S. sweetheart, Peggy Joy Parrish of Prosser in July of 1958. Peggy was Miss Prosser in 1957.

After High School, Gary worked out at the Hanford site for 2 years in the early 60's at several of the reactors on a utility crew, including the B reactor. The $$ was good, but Gary didn't much care for the shiftwork, unions or politics at Hanford so he decided to return to his roots and farm. It was a decision he never regretted and spent the remaining of his whole working career in agriculture. He sold fertilizer and other farming supplies, drove gas truck for Western Farmers in the early to mid-60's, and he farmed in the Prosser – Whitstran area in the late 60's with the Hop baron Pete Symanski. He and Pete Symanksi developed a new method to harvest the 12 foot tall hop vines with increased speed and efficiency using a Cat dozer that could pick several rows at one time and turn short enough on the field ends.

ete Taggares was a few years older than Gary, and had grown up in Prosser on his parent's farm which was next to ary's parent's farm in the late 40's & early 50's.

Since Gary had worked for Pete Taggares as a teenager in the early – mid 50's at the Taggares family farm on the Roza, Gary had a standing job offer with Pete Taggares in Othello when Pete Taggares went out on his own to on the newly developed Columbia Irrigation project in the Othello area. Gary took that job with Pete Taggares in 1969.

From 1969 to 1974, Gary had responsibility for most of the Taggares operations in Othello including the trucking, shop and farm divisions. He started up and ran the Taggares hay cuber in 1972. About the only thing Gary didn't run or manage for Pete Taggares in the Othello area during that period was the Chef Reddy French fry plant. In early 1974, Gary was transferred to manage the then 1700 acre Snake River Vineyard in SW Walla Walla County, 10 miles east of Burbank.

Snake River Vineyard was a 3 way partnership between PJ Taggaress, Seneca foods of New York and Chicago's JR Spiegel of the catalog fame. The property was 3,000 acres, with first phase of 1,700 acres of grapes planted in 1969-70. Taking over the whole responsibility of the vineyard in the spring of 1974 when the previous manger quit abruptly with no training or transition for Gary was a daunting task, Gary had never farmed any kind of grapes before and now he was the manager of the largest single known Concord grape planting in the world. The first harvest was just coming up; Gary had never mechanically picked a grape in his life.....

Gary and his shop mechanical crew pioneered an adjustable vertical impact picking head that could be observed by a econd operator at the level of the grapes on the back of the grape harvester which increased picking speed and fficiency. That first harvest went fairly well. The former manager was sure that Pete Taggares would beg him to return to manage the farm and run the harvest, and that Gary couldn't do the job. He was wrong on both counts.....

Gary also cut labor costs related to weed control and pruning and irrigation significantly over his predecessors.

Over the 18 years that Gary managed Snake River Vineyards, it set records for tonnage over a large planting, including a state record 14.7 tons per acre in 1979, compared to the state average of the time at 8.5 tons per acre. The vineyard averages over a 5 year period was from 1978 to 1983 the vineyard averaged 12.5 tons per acre, over 50% higher than the state average. It was not uncommon to pick over 1,000 semi loads of grapes per harvest from those 1,700 acres, at a rate of ~ 25 loads per day, day and night, 7 days per week for the 5-6 week harvest period. And as the vineyard expanded thru the 80's the harvests got even bigger.

Horticulturists, grape experts and other visitors from all over the world regularly toured the vineyard during the time Gary managed it. They were amazed at the sheer size of it, the small management presence and the sheer number of plants, posts, the magnitude of the irrigation systems, and other things. They were further amazed that Gary didn't have a college degree or have a full time degreed horticulturalist on staff, or even on retainer. One time a famous grape expert from the grape growing region of upstate New York asked Gary if he had ever seen a particular problem condition at the vineyard. Gary replied that not only he had never seen that condition; he had never even heard of that condition, which further amazed the entourage on the tour.

Through the 1980's, the remaining 1300 acres of open ground was transitioned from circle irrigation to either grapes or apples. When Gary left the vineyard in 1992, nearly all of the original 3,000 acres was planted to apples or grapes, with all that transition being managed by Gary, in addition to his running the existing grape and apples on the farm.

Gary and his 2 sons Michael & Rodney also had a small custom hay operation which ran from 1977 to 1995 and thus taught his 2 sons the value of hard work at a young age, which also supplemented their respective college educations.

In 1988, Gary developed a small 38 acre orchard for his retirement and successfully grew Golden Delicious and Gala apples until he sold that orchard in Dec of 2011, and he retired at age 73. From 1988 to 2011, (with a 2 season break from 2007-2008 while he was in on a church mission on Tonga), he did all the work himself except he hired crews to help with pruning and harvest. He did the irrigation, tractor work, spraying and all other tasks all himself.

In 2007-2008 Gary and Peggy served an 18 month church mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS church) to the Kingdom of Tonga, and they worked at a church High School teaching Tongan youth. Gary taught welding and shop.

Gary has worked in the mid-Columbia agricultural industry his whole life. Not really having any hobbies beyond his marriage and family, because work and farming was his primary interest.

Gary lives in Kennewick with his good wife Peggy of 54 years. They have 4 children, Michael of Burbank Hts. Marilyn of Redding CA, Leslie and Rodney, both of Kennewick, 17 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

Nominator Editorial comment:

Gary has no idea I have nominated him, I don't want him to know in advance or be disappointed if he is not selected. I feel he is most deserving as he has worked his whole life in Agriculture in this area, and has made significant contributions especially in the grape industry. He has not sought publicity, honor or the limelight his whole life, he has just worked with an untiring ethic to provide for his family and run the farm, whether his own or the Pete Taggares's Snake River Vineyard / Orchards as best as he possibly could. He has been a faithful husband and father and an example of consistent performance and hard work. He has made significant contributions to the area Ag industry in terms of the grape industry, and set state records for average tons per acre over the largest planting of Concords known in the world.

ars of Community and Agricultural Service:

Gary has served on or been a board member of the following organizations:

CBC Agricultural Advisory Board

CBC Vocational Advisory Board

Walla Walla County Pest Control Board

WA State Grape Society, member and board member

WA State Horticultural Association, member and board member

Volunteer for the Walla Walla County fire district 5

He donated a significant part of labor and proceeds in his custom hay business in the late 70's and early 80's to help build the first and second phases of the LDS church in Burbank Hts and was the chairman of the church building budget committee.

18 month service mission (with his wife Peggy) to the Kingdom of Tonga in 2007-2008 and taught Tongan youth welding, mechanical skills and other farming related training.

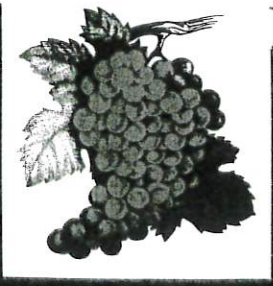
ıry was the technical advisor to the tree planting on the Columbia Burbank School district ball field perimeter in 2011.

Gary has supported the 4-H program and supported the stock sales at both the BF Fair and the CBJLS in Connell for many years.

The Goodgrape Grower

Volume 5, Number 3—July 15, 1975
P.O. Box 2696, Yakima, WA 98902

A quarterly supplement to THE GOODFRUIT GROWER



Yakima Valley vineyards observed on recent tour

By Pat Hagood
Special Correspondent

Vineyards are vigorous this summer at the Snake River Vineyards east of Pasco where 1500 acres are planted to Concord grapes and 100 acres to European varietal and French Hybrid wine grapes.

"Planting of another 1000 acres to Concord grapes is indefinite now due to California's over supply of wine, price prospects and the large expected Concord acreages coming into production," Gary Scrimsher, manager, told a group of growers and Washington State University scientists on tour in June.

The group from Washington, California and Canada visited the Snake River, Balcom and Moe, Bacchus, Ste. Michelle and WSU Irrigated Agricultural Research and Extension Center vineyards.

Both Concord and wine grapes are trained the double curtain method at the Snake River Vineyards. They have three mechanical harvesters plus stemmer crusher machines to be used in the vineyard which were designed by Valley Foundry in Fresno, CA.

Crushed grapes are transported from the vineyards about 50 miles to Prosser in steel milk tanks where they are processed. This arrangement is most efficient for large tonnage, said Scrimsher. Wine grapes include European varietals Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, White Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc. French Hybrids are Baco Noir, Siebel 5279, and Foch.

PLANTS MATURING

About one third of the Concords were planted in 1971 and the rest of the Concords in 1972. This will mean that the four and five year old plants will be nearing maturity production this fall. The Snake River Vineyards deliver their grapes to Seneca Foods, Inc., at Prosser.

Last year Seneca Foods built two additional grape tanks to store projected increased acreage.

The Snake River Vineyards is jointly owned by Arthur Wolcott, president of Seneca a New York based company; Pete Taggares, Jr., large potato producer and processor, and Ted Spiegal of the Chicago catalogue company.

The Snake River Vineyards lie on an old flood plain. They are irrigated by solid set sprinklers with a steel main line and plastic leadoff pipe.

Almost all the area has 12 to 15 feet deep sand. Various layers of coarse and fine sand affect the water holding capacity and rooting depth of grape plants.

Dr. Walter Clore, horticulturist, Pat Middleton, irrigation scientist, and Irving Dow, soil scientist, all from the WSU Research and Extension Center near Prosser, are conducting experiments on water requirements, fertility, and maturity.

A water holding capacity of one inch per foot is used as a base for irrigations plus an evaporation pan to measure optimum water requirements.

Middleton is comparing three irrigation treatments. The optimum amount of water is sprinkled on one area; 25 percent more water in another area, and 25 percent less in a different area. They are also using a fourth treatment which tests what happens when water is cut off early in the fall or late summer to hasten maturity.

The researchers have discovered that where there is an abrupt change in the texture of the sand, the grower finds a perched water table at the interface which restricts oxygen and rooting.

Dr. Clore showed in pit studies how grape roots had sought depth in some areas but where grape plants had been hilled up in the spring the roots remained close to the surface and were vulnerable to frost damage.

"The nitrogen relationship to grape growth and maturity is one of the biggest problems in Central Washington," Dow told growers. Grapes that do not harden off quickly in the fall are subject to early frost damage.

In the experiments at the Snake River vineyards they are applying various rates of 40, 120 and 240 pounds of nitrogen to the acre. An

(Continued on page 2)

Gary Scrimsher, manager of the Snake River Vineyards, briefs tour members on the varieties of wine grapes in the 100 acres of European varietal and French Hybrid plantings.

Vere Brummund, research scientist for the Concord Grape Resea Council, explains how the herbicide Casaron may cause plant dam

Dr. Walt Clore, [far left] horticulturist with W.S.U.'s Research and Extension Center near Prosser, demonstrates how hilling up during spring may encourage shallow rooting.

John Pringle, manager of the Bacchus, Dionysus and Sagemo Vineyards, explains his operation to members of the recent vineya tour.

TCH
June
1978

Apples to be planted at state's biggest vineyard

Washington's largest vineyard is scheduled to take on a new look in 1978 — apples.

Snake River Vineyards, east of Pasco on Highway 124, plans to plant 160 acres of Red Rose Delicious and other varieties of apples this spring on what had been exclusively a vineyard for over five years.

The farm, which envelops the highway near Ice Harbor Dam with fragrant Concord grape plants, produces 10 per cent of Washington's total grape crop.

Farm manager Gary Scrimsher said though the 1977 crop was disappointing grape yield per acre should increase in 1978.

The addition of apple orchards came at the request of the farm's distributing plant, Seneca Farms in Prosser, Scrimsher said.

Snake River Vineyards will remain primarily a grape farm, he added, with additional grape vines scheduled for planting in 1978. The newly planted apple trees are not expected to bear a harvestable crop until the early 1980s, Scrimsher said.

The 40-million vineyard which can produce 25,000 tons of grape juice annually employs 30 full-time workers, Scrimsher said. During the peak employment period, the winter pruning season, employees increase to around 100.

The grape harvest is entirely mechanized, he said. Every fall, large mechanical harvesters run up and down the long rows of grape vines shaking the ripe purple fruit off the branches into collection bins.

The grapes are then trucked to the processor to be made into juice, jams or wine.

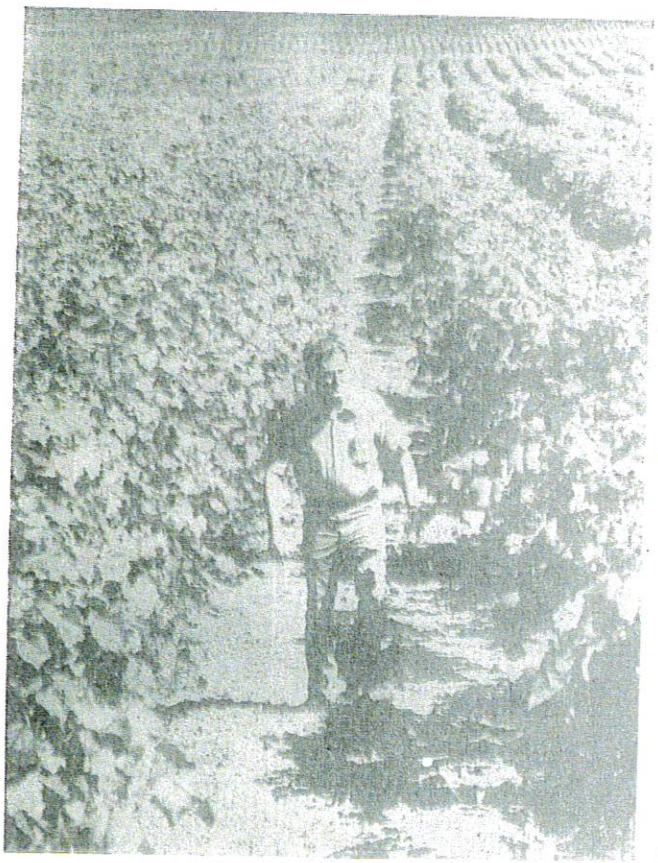
The farm, owned by Bob Taggares of Othello, Ted Spiezel of Chicago, and Arthur Wilcott of Dundee, N.Y., is considered one of the most modern vineyards in the country.

Workers are dispatched into the fields via two-way radios, and visitors have a choice of reaching the farm by highway or flying in, landing on the farm's air strip.

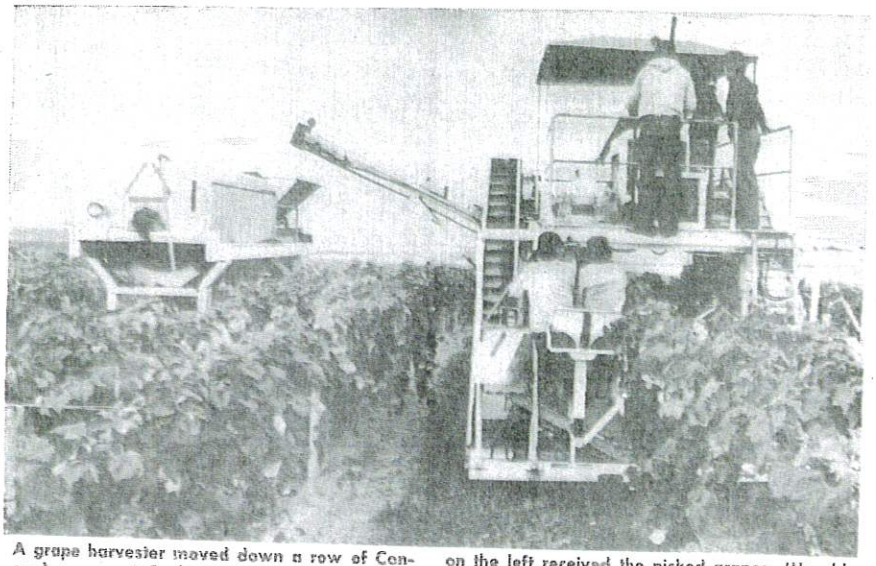
The vineyards were hard hit by herbicide damage in 1977, Scrimsher said. The herbicide thought to be at fault, 2,4-D, is used extensively on the wheat fields that surround the grape farm.

The state Department of Agriculture has been investigating the chemical, used to kill broad-leaf weeds, to determine how it could be applied without damaging other crops.

Until the herbicides can be regulated, Scrimsher said, the farm's yield per acre could continue to decrease.



Snake River Vineyards manager Gary Scrimsher strolled down one of the farm's hundreds of rows of grapes.



A grape harvester moved down a row of Concord grapes at Snake River Vineyard west of Burbank. A tank machine pulled by a tractor on the left received the picked grapes. (Herald photo by Bob Woehler)

9/2/78

Grape harvesters race to beat frosts

The Mid-Columbia Concord grape harvest began Wednesday, with farmers racing to beat the first fall frosts.

Growers, starting a week to 10 days later than usual due to a wet, cool August, said they will harvest around the clock, seven days a week.

It will take from 35 to 45 days to complete the harvest of a crop expected to be 45 percent larger than last year, they estimate.

The Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service predicts 155,000 tons of grapes will be harvested this year, compared with 105,000 tons in 1977.

Growers say the harvest will extend into early November when the danger of frost is greater.

"The first frost isn't the one that hurts. All it does is get rid of the leaves," said Lonnie Conner, Pasco grower and third vice president of the National Grape Growers Cooperative (Welch).

"It's the second frost, which hits the unprotected fruit, that causes the damage," he said. The second frost causes grapes to drop to the ground and the losses can be greater than 50 percent in some instances, Conner said.

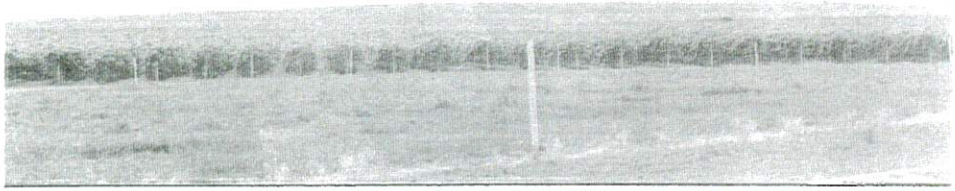
The grapes must reach between 15 and 16 percent sugar content before they can be processed into concentrates for juice and jams.

Some vineyards haven't reached the 16 percent sugar content yet and the general harvest isn't expected to begin until at least Saturday, Conner said.

He said getting the grapes harvested in time is a real concern. "Everyone will want to harvest their grapes at once."

Gary Scrimsher, manager of the 1,600-acre Snake River Vineyards west of Burbank, said processing plants can handle a limited amount of grapes each day, so it would do no good to bring in extra mechanical pickers to help.

Northwest Grape Grower, July 1983



Vineyards extending to the horizon.

Spreading Efficiency Across 2000 Acres

Pasco's Snake River Vineyards are the region's largest. They are also outyielding most of the state's Concord acreage.

At what size does a vineyard, or any other agricultural enterprise for that matter, become unmanagable? If recent history is any indiction, the large corporate farm can easily become strangled by inefficiency. Agriculture doesn't lend itself easily to factory-like operations. Neither the crop nor its enemies punch a time clock and critical decisions in large corporate operations can be "delegated" through so many hands that control is lost. There is often a delay in communication between the head and the tail of the corporate beast, and the organization can find itself cronically reacting to crises, perpetually playing catch-up. Some corporate farms in Eastern Washington have reported tremendous losses and others sport yield records which would absolutely discredit smaller operations with lending institutions.

Against this background, Snake River Vineyards of Pasco stands forth as something of a minor phenominon. In any terms, this Concord vineyard is successful. In the last five years, Snake River has averaged 12½ tons per acre which is considerably better than last year's bumper-crop average of 7.83 tons per acre for Washington Concord vineyards. The fact which makes their figures remarkable, however, is the sheer size of the vineyard. Snake River has acquired a string of firsts. At 2,000 acres, it is the largest vineyard which literally constitutes 10 percent of Washington "total" Concord acreage is a pheonominon worth examining. This is especially true when one recognizes that the vineyard is set on the edge of the Palouse wheat country and has, in the past, been more vulnerable to 2,4-D drift than most area Concord vineyards.

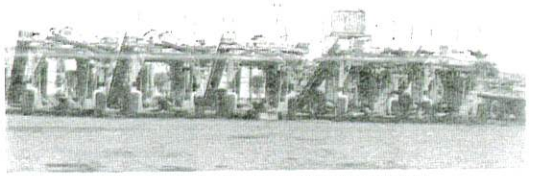
even edges out Ste. Michelle's Patterson facility for the size bragging-rights to the state and region. To have achieved per acre yeilds which are at least 60 percent greater than the state average and to do so on a

Gary Scrimsher

Actually, Snake River is a very low keyed giant in the Concord industry. They realize that their sheer size (they contributed nearly 30,000 tons to the 150,000 ton state-wide harvest of 1981) could stir up some pretty serious anxieties and have opted for a "calm the waters" diplomacy toward the industry. Gary Scrimsher, Snake River's general manager, seems very committed to a "Work-with" strategy. For example, he was very cautious with the "Northwest Grape Grower", not wanting to say anything which might inadvertently embroil his organization in controversy.

They have found the strategy works, for Gary sits on the 2,4-D committee and has seen 2,4-D damage at Snake River become less and less over the last three years due to a growing understanding between vineyardists, wheat growers and aerial applicators. Cooperation has gained much more than confrontation ever could. Further, the approach has calmed initial grower fears that such extensive vineyards would destabilize prices and virtually dictate to the industry. That grower fears haves been calmed can be seen by the fact that this year Gary was elected to the board of the Washington Grape Society, voted in by the growers themselves.

Far from disrupting the Washington Grape industry, it is now clear that Snake River has much to offer, especially by demonstrating efficient management of large scale vineyard operations. According to Gary, the difference between a good and bad farm is simply a matter of timing. By this he means that the water must be applied, the weeds removed, before the plant shows signs of harm. It seems an obvious truth, but as with many such obvious truths, this one is deceptive in its apparent simplicity. The efficiency of many large scale farm operations has begun to disintegrate on the "eight-to-five mentality". Serious scheduling problems occure, but workers are less motivated by critical timing than a private owner might be. The critical becomes less critical in the minds of the work force and delays occure which sets the crop back slightly. A stressed plant may recover, but it never regains the growth it lost while suffering



Snake River's Fleet of 5 Up-Right harvesters

page 2, NW Grape Grower July 1983

the unhealthy conditions.

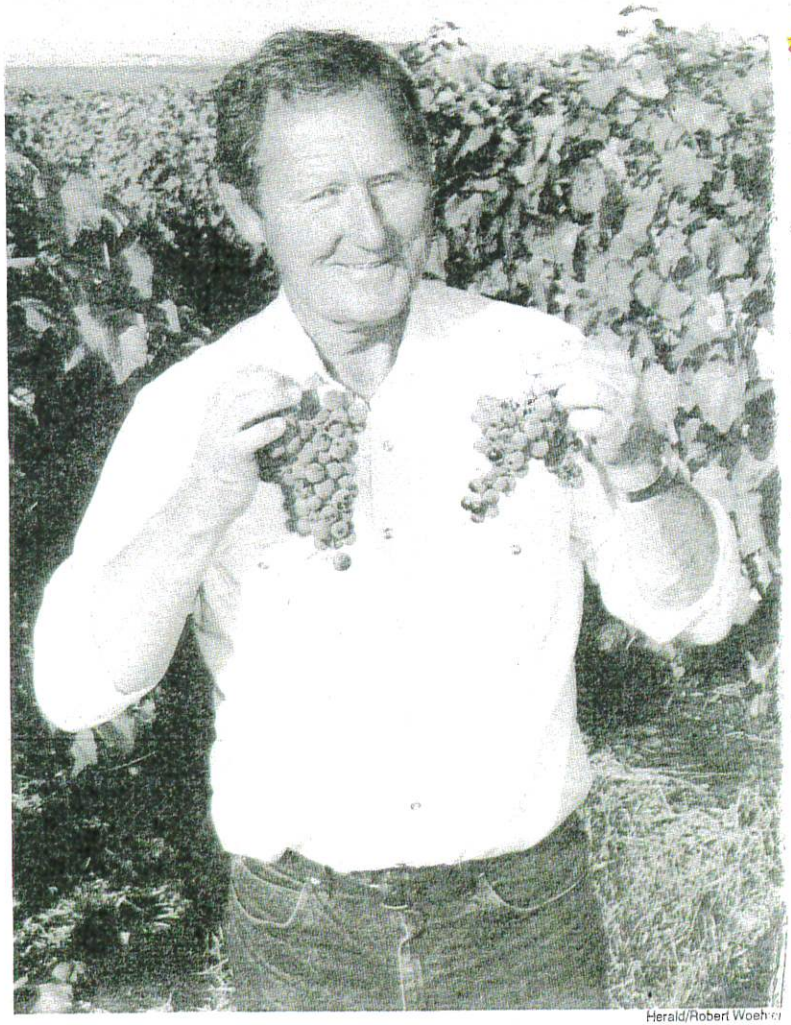
If the key to successs in the large vineyard operation is timing, as Gary suggests, how then has Snake River grasped that key? The answer is contained in the phrase "personnel selection and assignment". One suspects that the P.J. Taggares organization which owns Snake River has already learned the lesson in their extensive potatoes, row crops operations, and simply applied it to the vineyard. One places professional management in charge. A management which is familiar with the problems and methods of spreading great numbers of machines and personnel over huge acreages. One opts for nuts-and-bolts skills rather than specialized scientific talent. Gary Scrimsher is the prime example. His background is in the practical side of farming, machinery, fertilizers and finally experience with the Taggares organization itself and its extensive farming operations. Put a man in charge who understands the practical side of every operation, a man like Gary. Personnel, their selection and use, were mentioned by Gary as important to the management of vineyards of Snake River's scale. There are two essential principles which he reported. First, they look for someone who is trainable, not necessarily trained. Flexibility and quickness in learning is a positive asset to the operation, the dogmatism of a self-appointed 'expert' is not. For this reason they are leary of people whose ideas haves been "set" in another vineyard. Gary says he has learned there is some wisdom in the worn adage about old dogs and new tricks.

Perhaps of even more importance is the manner by which they delegate responsibility. A single forman is placed over every critical part of the operation. For example, one man is responsible for the irrigation and only the irrigation. Similarly, another permanent employee is responsible for all pruning and other hand labor work in the vineyard.

Pruning, by the way, is rather complicatd since the vineyard is pruned at three different levels to create early medium and later maturity to ease harvesting pressure. One woman oversees this task, directing as manv as 25 crew bosses.

By delegating authority to specialists trained in Snake River Viticultural thinking, the organization gains single-person accountability for critical parts of the operation. By hiring the trainable rather than the trained, they create a work force unified with respect to the goals and methods set by the company. In this way, they avoid the anarchy of ideas which can disorient larger agricultural operations and which is caused by competition between personnel as each pushes his own "pet" theory to advance himself in a game of corporate one-upmanship. The yields achieved by Snake River testify to the success of their organizational philosophy.

Burbank vineyard boss feels harvest crush



Herald/Robert Woehler

Gary Scrimsher, manager of Snake River Vineyards, holds up two bunches of prime Concord grapes

By ROBERT WOEHLER
Herald staff writer

About this time of year Gary Scrimsher gets sick and tired of purple.

Scrimsher is manager of the 2320-acre Snake River Vineyards near Burbank.

It's the world's largest Concord grape planting, so large that it takes a month of night and day harvesting to bring the crop in.

And that doesn't count 450 acres of apples on the property.

"I'm pretty sick of the sweet smell of the grapes ... by the time harvest is over," he said.

Harvest ended last Saturday night after starting Sept. 30. It was shorter than usual because of a light crop caused by bad weather last winter.

"I was glad to see it end, but I would have liked to see us harvest a little bigger crop."

This is his 17th harvest at the vineyards, which is about 10 miles east of Burbank along Highway 124.

There are five mechanical harvesters. They work around the clock keeping day and night crews of 30 people each constantly on the go.

The vineyard is 3 miles from one end to the other. The rows are a half-mile long. It takes 20 to 30 minutes for a harvester to go down one row and come back another.

Scrimsher makes a point to be on hand for the 6:30 p.m. shift change. He checks with the shift foremen and the crews to make sure everything is going smoothly.

Sometimes, he admits, sleep takes precedence over the 6:30 p.m. shift change.

The Snake River crop is so large that Seneca of Prosser and Smuckers of Grandview schedule their processing operations around it.

Harvest is the payoff for Scrimsher.

Until this year Scrimsher managed both the grape and apple orchards.

Concords big guns of grape acreage

There are an estimated 22,000 acres of Concord grapes in Washington, about double the acreage of wine grapes.

Traditionally, Concords bring Washington farmers $50 million annually.

Another $78 million to $90 million in value is added when the grapes are squeezed into concentrates to be made into juice and jams.

The lower Yakima Valley has the largest concentration of Concord processing plants in the world.

Snake River Vineyards, owned by P.J. Taggares of Othello, provides more than a 10th of the state's grape tonnage. The state's average yield is 7½ tons an acre. Snake River's average is 12 tons an acre and often is 14 tons or above, Scrimsher said.

He joked he was getting too old to keep up with both so he's concentrating on grapes while someone else worries about apples.

Most of his time is spent driving his white pickup up an down the roads of the vineyard, watching for trouble.

White is a trademark of Taggares. Even power poles that border the vineyards have their lower half painted white.

Scrimsher carries a pair of coveralls and tools in the back of his pickup. "I used to be one of the better mechanics on the farm and still pitch in when I'm needed," he said.

Scrimsher says he finds time to enjoy his job — even during harvest.

His wife, Peggy, and other first-grade teachers at Burbank bring their classes out for field trips.

The youngsters pick and eat the grapes and learn how the equipment operates.

"When they get back to class they are served grape jelly on crackers and grape juice," Scrimsher said.

This gives the youngsters a better understanding of the source of grape juice and jelly and of the harvest, he said.

While at the farm youngsters see tall mechanical harvesters straddling rows. A man is perched on top each machine.

The harvesters have finger-like bars that knock the bunches of grapes from the vines.

The grapes travel on a conveyor belt into a gondola pulled by tractors. Each gondola holds four tons of grapes.

The gondolas then are dumped into waiting trucks and trailers that can handle 24 tons of grapes.

On a normal day, 35 to 40 semi-truck loads are taken 40 miles to processing plants in Prosser and Grandview.

The night crews work under the glare of headlights. "The night mechanics don't like it, because it's more difficult to spot a breakdown in the field when it's dark," Scrimsher said.

For now harvest is over, but soon he'll be lining up the pruning crew.

That's a job that carries well into next spring. Then irrigation season begins and the process starts over.

When he retires in a few years he'll probably concentrate on a small apple orchard he's developing for himself.

Then perhaps he'll learn to enjoy the color purple again.

Gary Scrimscher, manager of Snake River Vineyards, checks the world's largest concord-grape vineyard daily

Walla Walla U-B
9-19-76

Grape harvest to begin in west part of county

Harvest of the world's largest concord grape vineyard begins this week at the Snake River Vineyards in western Walla Walla County.

Three giant machines will travel up and down the three-mile-long rows 24 hours a day for the next five weeks.

At the end of that time, the $42,500 machines will have picked the vineyard clean and finished the work of 600 men.

According to Gary Scrimscher, manager of the vineyards, the mechanical grape harvesters save about $25 per ton in labor costs, compared to what it would cost for hand labor.

There are 1,500 acres of concords which are picked by machine. The vineyards also include an additional 150 acres of other grape varieties.

Some of those varieties are not suitable for machine harvesting so they are hand picked, according to Scrimscher.

He says all the grapes at the vineyards look good this year. Quality is good and the yield will be about average.

Scrimscher says it against Snake River Vineyards' policy to release specific yield figures until after harvest.

But, he says the Washington average yield for concord grapes is between eight and nine tons per acre.

The vineyards yielded an average of seven tons per acre last year, according to the manager.

There is always the threat of a hard frost during harvest which could damage the crop severely, Scrimscher says.

"But I'm optimistic it won't freeze this year until after we're finished," he says.

Operation of the vineyards, which were planted in 1970 and 1971, is a year-around process, Scrimscher says.

During November, repairs are made to stakes and vine wires. After that, from December through March, the vines are pruned.

This is done by manual labor and is a critical process. It has to be done just right in order to insure proper production, according to Scrimscher.

He says it takes about 100 men to prune the vineyards. Each of these men has to be trained before the pruning season.

"It's our single largest labor item in the operation," Scrimscher says.

After pruning is completed, the grapes need to be irrigated until harvest.

Water for irrigation is pumped from the Snake River. Depending on the weather, the grapes require 30 to 40 inches of irrigation water per year.

A problem which has been associated with the vineyards since they were started is 2-4D drift, according to Scrimscher.

He says that grapes are about 100 times more susceptible to damage from the pesticide than other broad-leaf plants.

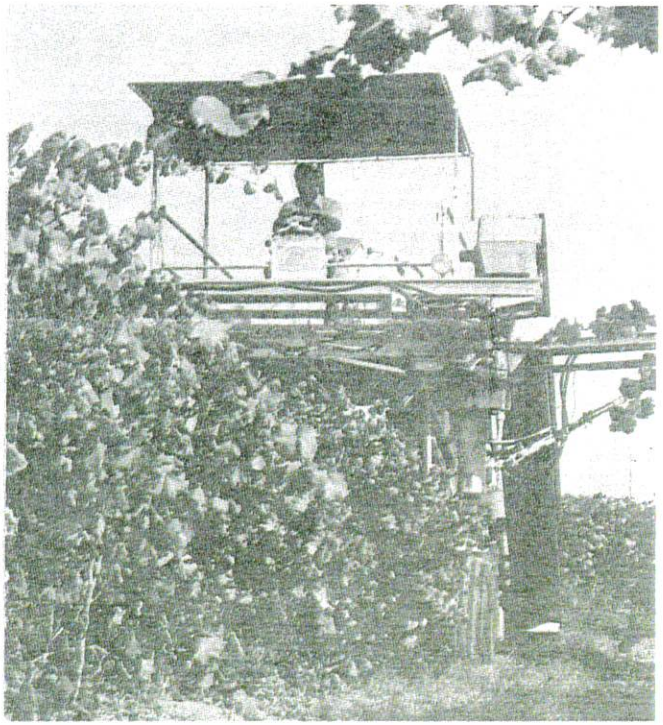
The 2-4D can either kill the grapes, or stunt the growth of the vines and reduce yields, according to the manager.

He says studies are under way now to try and determine where the drift is coming from, but so far the source has not been found.

Scrimscher says that during the spring months, daily samples are taken in the vineyards to detect 2-4D in the atomosphere.

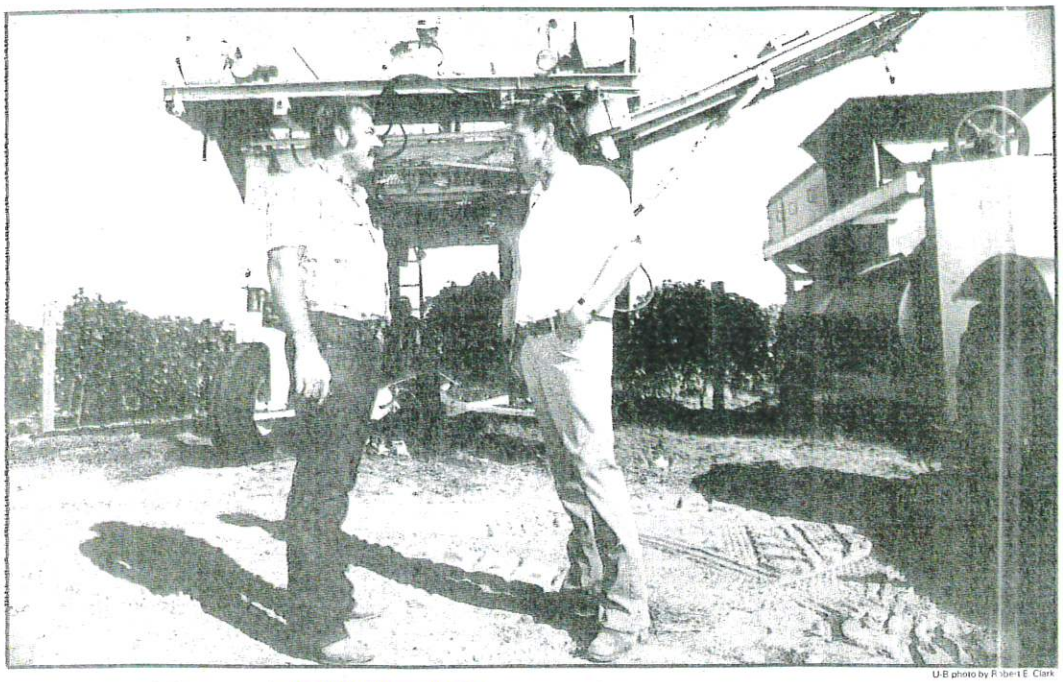
All the grapes which are produced in the vineyards are processed by Seneca Foods at Prosser.

During harvest, they are shipped there in stainless-steel tanks by truck.



A grape harvester at Snak River Vineyards is checke out prior to starting harves this week. Three of the giar machines are used to pic the 1,500-acre concor vineyard. They can do th job of 600 men. Th machines will be operating i the vineyards day and nigh

agriculture



U-B photo by Robert E. Clark

John VanderHorst, (left), owner, and Gary Scrimsher, manager, discuss this year's grape crop as a harvester rolls through the Snake River Vineyard toward them.

Vineyard fares well despite severe winter

By JERI FREIMUTH
Of the Union-Bulletin

The steady whir of harvest machinery wheeling through the Snake River Vineyards had John VanderHorst smiling this week.

VanderHorst, one of six new owners from Hanford, Calif., is working in his first Concord grape harvest this year. He's watching a full crop come off the vines at the 2,800-acre vineyards.

Other parts of Washington did not fare so well this year. The severe winter caused a 40 percent loss to Concord vineyards in the Yakima Valley, VanderHorst said.

News of that loss reached the California buyers this spring, just months after they purchased the world's largest Concord vineyards near the Snake River.

They were soon assured that the loss at the Snake River vineyards was only about 3 percent, VanderHorst said.

Manager Gary Scrimsher was careful not too take too much credit for the high survival rate. Mother Nature played a big roll, he said.

But growing a good crop of grapes is a challenge for Scrimsher and this year, whatever the reason, he came up a winner.

Last winter was the most severe since the Snake River Vineyard's first harvest in 1974, said Scrimsher.

Concord grapes tend to be hardier than wine grape varieties, Scrimsher said. In test situations vines have survived temperatures of 50 degrees below zero.

To survive those temperatures the vines must be climatized by slow cooling of weather in the fall, said Scrimsher. Good management practices and keeping the plants healthy can make a difference, too, he said.

The Snake River Vineyards grow about 10 percent of Washington's Concord grape crop, said Scrimsher.

The clusters are all machine harvested and dropped through a crusher as they come off the harvesting machine.

From there, the crop is handled in a liquid form. The crushed grapes drop into a small tank and then are pumped to a waiting, 6,000-gallon tanker for transport to Seneca Foods at Prosser.

There they are filtered and processed for use in jams, jellies, juice and wines.

For about six weeks, three harvesters will roll through the miles of grapes around the clock, Scrimsher said.

Harvest can't start until the sugar content or brix of the grapes comes up to standards, Scrimsher said.

Grapes going to the processor are testing at about 17 percent sugar, according to VanderHorst.

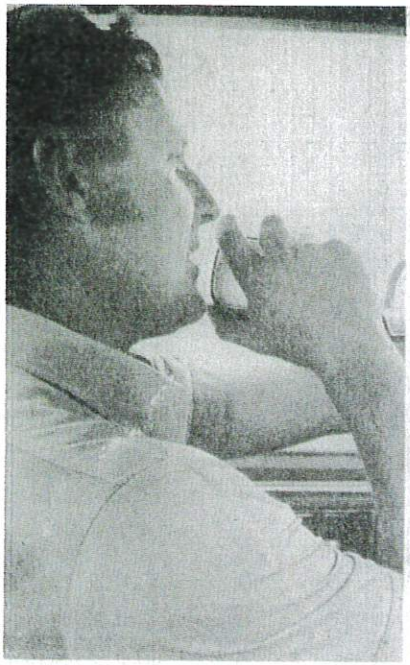
"It's critical to get them off before the first frost," said VanderHorst. "If the frost comes, the grapes fall off the vines before the picker gets there."

Long prongs on the harvesters shake the wires that hold the grape vines dropping the fruit onto conveyer belts.

The vineyards may eventually use a similar principal to harvest apples for processing, said Scrimsher.

The vineyards now have 160 acres planted in apples and another 160 acres will be planted in 1980, Scrimsher said.

TCH 2-11-79



Photos by Bob Wynne

ake River Vineyards farm manager Gary imsher checked in over a pick-up mounted lio during last fall's harvest.

through a row of vines on the Snake River Vineyards during the fall harvest.

By BOB WYNNE
Herald Staff Writer

For Gary Scrimsher, harvest season means one thing; long days and short nights.

Scrimsher, manager of the $12.5 million Snake River Vineyards, arises before 5 a.m. on a typical morning during the harvest and doesn't call it quits until long after dark.

And even while Scrimsher catches a few hours of sleep, huge mechanical harvesters, equipped with large flood lamps, continue to work their way up and down the rows of vines.

The farm, developed by P.J. Taggares, Othello, Art Wolcott and the Spiegel interests of Chicago, was sold in January to MVM Ranches of Hanford, Calif., and John J. Vanderhorst, Fresno, Calif.

Taggares retained 15 percent ownership of the farm and continued to manage and operate it.

Scrimsher resembles a military officer during a battle on a typical harvest day. He patrols the 3,300-acre farm in a radio-equipped pickup directing the harvesters, repairing sprinkler systems and "handling all the emergencies."

Scrimsher knows the unpredictable fall weather during the seven-week harvest season could easily ruin a year's labor.

And it is his responsibility to see that the state's largest Concord grape vineyard completes the harvest before cold weather sets in.

To get the job done, Scrimsher has three $35,500 harvesters, two large tank trucks, tractor-pulled collectors and a fleet of radio-equipped pickups.

"I am the kind of guy who expects everything to work perfectly," he said. We don't have time for mistakes or mechanical failures.

"I also expect more from my people than they can possibly produce; to be honest I probably expect too much."

But Scrimsher sets the pace, racing from one problem to another keeping all the equipment moving.

Scrimsher has ramrodded the harvest and off-season pruning and planting at the farm for the last four years. He has worked for the farm's owner, Peter J. Taggares, Othello, for 10 years.

"I like the work," he explains. "I was raised on a farm in Prosser and I'm basically a mechanic. I like to take care of things myself."

Under Scrimsher's direction the farm recorded its best harvest ever in 1978, with 13 tons of grapes coming off every acre, compared with a yield of four tons per acre in the herbicide-plagued 1977 season.

The farm has 40 full-time employees and hires an additional 40 workers during the spring pruning, which requires hours of hand labor.

Mechanic Dale Wood repaired a grape harvester.

"This year is going to be hard to duplicate," Scrimsher said of 1978. "All the conditions were just right. Mother Nature was good to us."

Scrimsher was making a quick inspection of the farm's fledgling 160 acres of apple trees when the call came over the radio informing him a harvester had jammed.

"Don't try to push it with a cat (caterpillar tractor)," Scrimsher said, breaking into the conversation. "Give me your location, I'll be right down there."

As Scrimsher drove past 40 acres of new grape plants he explained his concern about the harvester.

"Those machines cost $68,000 to replace and they are not meant to be pushed with a cat," he said. "If they are not working there is a reason. You've got to figure out what is wrong, and then fix it, not shove it with a cat."

After grabbing a handful of wrenches, Scrimsher climbed into the harvester's cab and made the necessary repairs.

But the brakes on one of the tank trucks had frozen up, and as the harvester headed down a row of vines, Scrimsher climbed under the truck and removed a broken brake line.

"It isn't always like this," he explained as he drove into the shop late in the day to begin repairing the brake line.

"If you came in the winter, we could talk in the office for an hour and then tour the fields for two," he said. But not during harvest.

The truck's radio crackles. Important parts haven't arrived and Scrimsher is on the phone in a minute calling the supplier.

And so it goes through the long days of the harvest.