

Ron Bitner Speech
Farm Bill

Nestled between the Rocky Mountains and the Snake River, the Idaho wine regions are growing steadily. Nurturing the grapes with a moderate climate, limited precipitation, and a consistent growing season, the Idaho wine regions add complexity to the grapes. We need to do everything in our power to see that this industry continues to succeed.

The Idaho wine industry has been steadily growing for the last 30 years with remarkable growth in the past decade. With 11 wineries in 2002, Idaho is now home to over 40 with 1600 acres of grapes planted. 9 of these wineries have opened in the past year. That's a lot of growth in a down economy.

In order to see the impact the Idaho wine industry is having, the IWC worked with BSU to conduct an economic impact study. The results were startling. It was concluded the Idaho Wine industry had a \$73 million dollar impact in 2008 and created nearly 625 jobs. This growth led to an increase in visibility, more tourism, an enhanced reputation, and has created tremendous opportunity for expansion.

You might be thinking how are the sales and are any Idaho wines selling. The answer is good and yes. Idaho wines are at an affordable price point between \$10-30, encouraging consumers to try new, undiscovered wines that are affordable in this economic downturn instead of reaching for the \$50 and \$100 bottles. Media has also been paying attention to Idaho, as they are looking at the next big thing and that's Idaho. Countless articles have been written.

So the next question, where are we going? The truth is the industry will continue to grow as national wine consumption increases, as well as Idaho's grape growing potential. Idaho wines are discovered across the country, ranking us 22nd in the nation.

The Idaho wine industry is just in its infancy and is expected to see remarkable growth in the next 15 years. Just coming into its own, and receiving a great deal of recognition, winemakers and growers are learning as they go and making great wine in the process. More and more people are buying Idaho wine and this is good news for our economy.

In order for us to continue to have success, we need to determine what to do about immigration reform, enhancing marketing, and continue with research.

Dealing with immigration is a sore subject for the wine industry. The immigrant workers are a crucial part of the industry, without them the work in the vineyards would not get done because it is very labor intensive. They face cold winters when pruning takes place and hot summers when training the vines. Many of these workers are probably illegal, but all they have to do is show their social security

card to the vineyard owner and they are good to go. However, under new laws the vineyard owner could face hefty fines and possible jail time if it turns out any of their employees are illegal. If you halt illegal immigration work, you halt the industry in return due to the lack of potential work by these men and women in the vineyards.

Marketing is another area we in Idaho need to focus on. Consumers know about California and Washington wine, but the need to learn more about Idaho wine is crucial, and the only way we can succeed is to spend more money to reach them. We can do this by participating in events, giving samples, creating a better website and buying ads on the radio, but all these take money. We need to concentrate on Marketing for this industry to succeed; otherwise people simply won't know we exist.

This past year we had substantial cuts to the University of Idaho's budget, resulting in almost losing the Parma Research Center where substantial research is conducted on grapes and wine. Without this research center, we would be forced to see data and research out of state, which would not be as applicable due to different climates for growing. While we got lucky this time, as the center will stay open, we do not know for how long, leaving the potential for losing the center up to another budget cut in the future. As the industry grows, tremendous research is needed to determine what we can grow best, looking for new varieties along the way and determining what grows best for Idaho.

Idaho truly has immense potential to be one of the leading wine industries in the country, but we need to get a handle on these issues before we can get there.

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Education

- Ph.D., Entomology, Utah State University, 1976
- M.S., Entomology, Purdue University, 1970
- College of Idaho, 1968

Doctoral Dissertation: Ecological Management of the Alfalfa Leafcutting Bee, *Megachile pacifica (rotundata)* Panzer, with Emphasis on Diapause Induction.
Supervisor: Dr. Ting Hsiao.

Professional Experience: Partner/Pollination Consultant, International Pollination Systems, 1990 – Present. IPS has representatives in Fisher Branch, Manitoba, Caldwell, Idaho and Visalia, California. The company provides consulting, management and brokerage of non-*Apis* bees on crops requiring bee pollination. Worked with CSIRO to develop pollination and integrated pest management programs for alfalfa seed and hybrid canola seed grown in Australia. Worked to develop the importation protocol for the Alfalfa Leafcutting Bee into Australia.

President, Pollination and Pest Management Consulting Services, 1981- present. A Caldwell, Idaho based company. Services include IPM programs for alfalfa seed, orchard crops and vineyards. The company has been retained since 1987 by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. to manage their alfalfa seed IPM programs throughout Canada, the Northwest and California.

Owner/Operator of Bitner Vineyards LLC. 15 acres of premium wine grapes first planted in 1981. Grapes are produced and sold to Idaho wineries with a select bottling of Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz under the Bitner Vineyards label. Pacific Northwest Magazine's 2009 Idaho Winery of the year. (www.bitnervineyards.com)

Recent Publications

Gillerman, V.S., Wilkins,D., Shellie,K., and Bitner,R.M. 2006, Geology and Wine 11. Terroir of the Western Snake River Plain, Idaho, USA: Geoscience Canada, v33(1), pp.37-48.

Bitner, R.M and S. Peterson. 2003. Introducing the Alfalfa Leafcutting Bee (Hymenoptera: Megachilidae) into Australia, A Case Study. Thomas Say Publications pp. 127-138.

Bitner, R.M. 2000. Overview of the pollination industry, pp. 1-5. *In* Pioneer Pollination Workshop Handbook, 19-20 October 2000, Johnson, Iowa.

Allen-Wardell, G., P. Bernhard, R.M. Bitner, *et. al.* 1998. The potential consequences of pollinator declines on the conservation of biodiversity and stability of food crop yields. *Conservation Biology*. 12(1): 8-17.

Peterson, S, C.R. Baird and R.M. Bitner. 1994. Heat retention during incubation in nests of the alfalfa leafcutting bee (Hymenoptera: Megachilidae). *J. Econ. Entomol.* 87:345-349.

Recent Grants and Awards:

- 2009 Bitner Vineyards, Winery of the Year, Wine Press Northwest Magazine
- 2005. College of Idaho Presidents Medallion Award
- 2003. College of Idaho Alumni Service Award for 2002.
- 2002. Pioneer Hi-bred International, Owen J. Newlin, Business Excellence Award. A member of the Australia Alfalfa Improvement Team.
- 2002. Idaho Crop Specialty Grant for the Use of the Alfalfa Leafcutting Bee as an Educational Tool in Idaho's K-12.
- 2002. USDA Small Business Innovative Research Award Recipient. Commercial Delivery of the Blue Orchard Bee for Orchard Pollination.
- 1999. USDA CRADA partnership with the ARS Bee Biology and Systematics Laboratory in Logan, Utah. Developing management systems for Blue Orchard Bees as pollinators of commercial almond orchards

Professional Activities

College of Idaho, Board of Trustees
Entomological Society of America
Idaho State Board of Education Research Council 1990-2004
Arizona Desert Museum Pollinator Advisory Committee
Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Association (1999-2006)
Director (2006-2007)
Idaho Preferred Marketing Advisory Committee
National Wine Grape Growers Association, President
WineAmerica, Intermountain regional representative to National Board
Caldwell/Canyon County Economic Development Consultant

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2007.

Name: Ron Bitner
Address: 116645 Plum rd Caldwell, ID 83607
Telephone: 208-454-0086
Organization you represent (if any): Bitner Vineyards

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: Ø Amount:
Source: Amount:

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: Ø Amount:
Source: Amount:

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: ✓

Signature: Ron Bitner

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

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