

Grüner Veltliner white wine could be the toast of Pennsylvania, study suggests

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In the past five years, Pennsylvania wines made from grüner veltliner grapes have received several accolades and awards. The wine won the “Best Dry Wine” category at a state competition. Credit: Michela Centinari/Penn State

States that are associated with signature varietals of wine can realize an economic benefit—some examples are regions in California linked with

zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay, Oregon with pinot noir and the Finger Lakes region of New York with riesling. Now, a new study by Penn State researchers suggests that there is potential for Pennsylvania to join that list.

In findings published in [*International Journal of Wine Business Research*](#), they report that a wine grape cultivar called Grüner Veltliner could bring recognition to the Keystone State and attract consumers. The vines, which grow well in cool climates, were first planted in Pennsylvania around 2003, the researchers noted. Since then, production has expanded across the Mid-Atlantic region, though acreage is still low relative to other cool-climate white grape cultivars.

Wine made from a signature grape cultivar could provide a point of differentiation for Pennsylvania, explained lead researcher Kathy Kelley, professor of horticultural marketing and business management in the College of Agricultural Sciences. The association can be used to promote the state's wine industry and more.

"Being associated with Grüner Veltliner wines could increase tourism and be used in marketing to highlight local cuisine and history," she said. "Our study aims to determine white wine drinkers' interest in Grüner Veltliner wine, a potential signature wine for the commonwealth, and identify the consumer segments likely to look for and purchase this wine varietal."

Field trials were conducted to determine the suitability for production in the state and a trained panel of wine consumers evaluated wine produced from Pennsylvania-grown Grüner Veltliner grapes to assess potential regional differences in sensory profiles. In the past five years, the researchers pointed out, Pennsylvania Grüner Veltliner wines have received several accolades and awards. The wine won the "Best Dry Wine" category at a state competition.

According to Wine Enthusiast, "The Grüner Veltliner grape is versatile and can produce a wide array of wines, from light and quaffable to rich and concentrated." The best dry Grüner Veltliners, the website stated, "are perfumed, bone dry and full bodied, with high acidity and distinctive notes of spice and white pepper."

Grüner Veltliner wine grapes are widely grown in Austria, comprising about a third of the country's total area under vine, the researchers said. It is recognized as the flagship variety grown in Austria, Kelley said, contributing to knowledge of the varietal that could lead to a thirst to try Pennsylvania grown and produced versions.

In the study, 676 wine consumers from the Mid-Atlantic region were surveyed and compared, based on their familiarity with Grüner Veltliner wine, their propensity to try new-to-them wines and the likelihood of looking for and purchasing Pennsylvania Grüner Veltliner wine. Although only a third of participants had some experience with Grüner Veltliner wine, 77% were "somewhat interested" to "very interested" in being able to sample and taste the wine, and 67% were "somewhat likely" to "very likely" to look for and purchase the wine.

Age, wine-consumption behavior, familiarity with Pennsylvania wine and Grüner Veltliner wine differed between participants, based on their variety-seeking ratings, which the researchers assessed based on answers to a questionnaire.

"Efforts to promote lesser-known wines need to be focused on identifying the likely buyers—especially those who tend to try new products or seek greater diversity in what they consume," Kelly said. "Variety seekers look for new and novel stimulus, and it is this quest for novelty that prompts consumers to try wines that are unfamiliar to them."

Study results present evidence of potential demand for a signature wine in Pennsylvania, the researchers suggest, adding that the research provides direction for targeted marketing and related promotional strategy, along with identifying wine that consumers are interested in tasting and purchasing.

Based on efforts to achieve recognition in other states, Kelley said, Pennsylvania likely will have to invest in developing coalitions to promote a signature grape cultivar.

"But if Grüner Veltliner wines gain a reputation for being consistently good across vintages and wineries, consumers are expected to sample and consume other wines and food products produced locally, thus driving further economic development," she said.

"With these potential benefits, it would be prudent for state and regional wine industry organizations to consider establishing the wine grape cultivar as a signature varietal."

More information: Kathleen Kelley et al, Evaluating white wine consumer interest in Grüner Veltliner: a potential signature varietal for Pennsylvania, *International Journal of Wine Business Research* (2024). DOI: [10.1108/IJWBR-04-2023-0020](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWBR-04-2023-0020)

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