WKU Vineyard

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Viticulture is growing at WKU as grape production makes a comeback across the state of Kentucky.

In this week’s View from the Hill, Amy Bingham looks at the University’s current and future plans for it’s expanding vineyard.

Back before prohibition, Kentucky ranked third in the nation in wine production. Since the late 90’s, the industry has been rebounding, and WKU is not being left behind.

Nathan Howell has a passion for vineyards.

“Once you get into grape production it gets into your blood.”

Howell has a vineyard of his own, but since March he has also served as Viticulture Technician for WKU’s Vineyard.

“The long term goal at the university is to have core classes and courses around wine production, marketing, the whole aspect, not just the production side of grapes.”

The plan is well on it’s way. The first two vineyards near the Elrod Road entrance to the WKU Farm were planted in 2008 and 2009.

“We have an education vineyard which has education classes come out and do hands on, we also have a research vineyard that is primarily research, graduate students are doing research projects in relation to grapes and grape production on those.”

The third vineyard is being planted this week.

“Now we’re actually digging holes and planting the grapevines, they’ll grow rapidly over the next couple of weeks.”

Owensboro Senior and Ag Major Camille Hayden is working with the viticulture program this summer. She says she was hooked after taking the intro to viticulture class. “Everything was interesting, we got to do hands on things out in the education vineyard. It just really sparked an interest.”

The next step is wine-making when these vines produce fruit in three years.

In the meantime, Howell wants to spread the education and passion for grape production to the entire community.

“We here at the University want to bring the community back to the far. “We’ve already had tour groups looking at the crop.”

Howell says the vines can live 30 to 40 years. The first vineyard that was planted in 2008 suffered quite a bit of hail damage during last Sunday’s brief thunderstorm.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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