



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

[Home](#) / Texas Tech Today

PLANT AND SOIL SCIENCE CREATES LOCAL FOOD AND WINE CONCENTRATION

Like 29

October 17, 2017

By: George Watson

The program will be the first of its kind in the U.S. focused on education and promotion of the growing local food and wine movement in Texas.



The growth of grape-growing and the winemaking industry on the South Plains has been a tremendous boon for Texas Tech University and the College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources.

That growth has led to extensive viticulture research being conducted in the area, as well as the college offering degree concentrations in viticulture and enology for students as well as viticulture and winemaking certification programs for wine industry entrepreneurs and prospective vineyard managers. But Texas Tech is hoping to take it a step further.

With approval from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Department of Plant & Soil Science will establish a new undergraduate degree specialization in local food and wine production systems, the first of its kind at a university in the U.S. The program will be located at both the Hill Country University Center, the university's Fredericksburg campus, and the main campus in Lubbock.

"This new program will provide educational opportunities for students who are interested in the rapidly growing local foods industry," Texas Tech Provost Michael Galyean said. "In addition, the Department of Plant & Soil Science will increase research and outreach activity in this new area of emphasis, while continuing to grow its ongoing efforts in viticulture and enology."



Ed Hellman

The program also hopes to collaborate with the Texas Center for Wine and Culinary Arts (TCWCA), a project under development by Fredericksburg civic and business leaders dedicated to promoting and celebrating Texas food, wine and agriculture through education. Construction of the center is planned for the Texas Tech campus in Fredericksburg.

The specialization will introduce students to the science behind wine and winemaking, with classes like wine production and viticulture, while also introducing them to the business side of the wine industry with classes in marketing and hospitality management.

“Texas Tech is responding to a national trend of increased consumer interest and demand for local production of food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables,” said Ed Hellman, a professor of viticulture and enology at Texas Tech who will lead the new program.

“The combination of local food production with local wine production is what makes this program unique and a natural fit for Texas, which is now the fifth-largest wine producing state in the country. The Texas Tech program also will emphasize sustainable production practices that are increasingly demanded by consumers and necessary for the long-term viability of agricultural production.”

Creation of the new concentration is a response to the continued growth of local-food sales, which the United States Department of Agriculture estimates will reach \$20 billion by 2019. This growth is driven by a middle-class push for better-tasting, greener products that go straight from the farm to the table.



The USDA's Economic Research Service reports that, in 2012, 8 percent of farms in the U.S. were marketing foods locally and that local food sales were estimated at \$6.1 billion. The number of farms selling local food direct to consumers increased more than 22 percent between 2002 and 2012.

In the Hill Country and Fredericksburg areas, the number of food and wine businesses are growing rapidly, and that growth is tied closely to the rising popularity of the local food movement emphasizing consumption of local fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products. That has made the Fredericksburg area one of the fastest-growing wine travel destinations in the U.S.

Under the proposed specialization, Texas Tech would establish a 2+2 program with the Central Texas College (CTC) campus in Fredericksburg, which would allow for completion of the degree at the Texas Tech Fredericksburg campus through both traditional and online classes.

The program also will recruit students from major Hill Country cities such as Austin and San Antonio, as well as the surrounding rural communities, and engage those communities through internships and continuing education opportunities. It will also coordinate with the wine marketing program at Texas Tech.

“With this new program in the Department of Plant & Soil Science, Texas Tech University will be the first U.S. university to establish an undergraduate degree concentration in Local Food and Wine,” said Eric Hequet, chairman of the Department of Plant & Soil Science. “This concentration addresses the increasing need for trained horticulturists to expand local food production, especially in urban areas, to increase the quality of produce and contribute to national food security.”
