

Happy Days of Grapes and Wine at Brazil's São Francisco Valley

Contributed by Marco Bahé
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The São Francisco River Valley, in the Northeast region of Brazil, is considered one of the best regions in the world to plant grapes. The reason: it practically doesn't rain.

It is because rain during the harvest may crack or make the grape go sour. Since there is only the possibility rain between December and March, it's possible to produce practically the whole year round in the Valley.

In producing regions where the climate is temperate, like the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, or South Africa, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand, California and Europe, it is only possible to produce once per year, in a short period of two months. In the Valley, manage even up to two and a half cycles per year.

This good duo between the climate and grape planting has generated also a new activity in the region. The Valley, especially the cities of Lagoa Grande and Santa Maria da Boa Vista, is becoming an important wine hub of the country.

Currently, as well as grapes, about 7 million liters of fine wines are produced per year over there, which represents 23% of the Brazilian production. The whole of Brazil produces 30 million liters per year and imports another 30 million liters of fine wines.

About 27 years ago, the oenologist from the south of Brazil Jorge Garziera was invited to travel to the Northeast to develop projects for table grapes. Some 14 years later was born the first wine from the São Francisco, the Boticelli.

"I planted the seed of an old dream, which is now yielding fruits through implementing the wine production hub. We currently have seven winegrowing plantations producing high quality wines (some having received international awards)," says the oenologist.

Another five already have the intentions protocol to start producing. Garziera invested US\$ 2.5 million to launch his own brands, Garziera and Carrancas do São Francisco.

With the profit margin offered, however, in natura grape production is still more attractive. The fruit is changing the Valley's farmer's profile. More than half of the production is responsibility of the small properties.

Having to work with new agriculture techniques, these producers have taken in the concept of rural businessmen. This is the case of the couple André Lira Machado, 38 years old, and Adriane Pinto de Sá Machado, 36.

In 1993, they left Recife, capital city of Northeastern state of Pernambuco, to work in the grape farms in the region. With their savings and a loan from the bank of the Northeast, Banco do Nordeste, they purchased 18 hectares of land and started their careers as fruit producers.

Today, their production is of 400 tons of grape per year. They also produce 150 tons of mango. Their revenues reach US\$ 209,600 per year.

"We got together with another seven small producers and settled an exporter, Néctar Agrícola. We managed to export 220 tons this year," celebrates André.

The entrepreneur states that direct exports are a lot more attractive. "In the internal market, one kilo of grapes is sold for US\$ 0.54. If we sell it to an exporter, the money is ensured, but it won't be more than US\$ 1.13 the kilo. Exporting it directly we can reach up to US\$ 1.51 for the kilo of the same grape. It is a great difference," he explains.

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