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*Editorial*

## **Thai wine industry: getting serious**

Wine has been produced locally in Thailand for over several decades. Much of the early production was boutique fruit wines, which still have some popularity within the country today. However, it is the development of grape wines that is fast making a name for Thailand, both locally and internationally.

Grapes have been grown in Thailand for over 300 years, some varieties producing 3-4 crops a year. Early attempts at wine making from grapes by both local and foreign makers met with very mixed success. That has now changed. In the face of free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, the soon to be implemented ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, an onerous tax on local production and strict regulations on promotion and advertising, wine makers have responded by focusing on quality and the results have been very pleasing. Local production is now just over 1 million bottles annually and some producers saw growth as high as 30% last year. In order to survive, wineries are now packaged to include restaurants and accommodation for visitors, in many cases making the most of the cooler climate in the growing areas.

While some producers persist with blending imported wine or grape juice concentrate, 100% Thai wines have been picking up international and local awards at an encouraging rate. To overcome the poor perception from the past, blind tastings have proven that Thai wines have indeed arrived.

The future looks promising and the industry is already employing locally trained viticulturists and horticultural students in what may become a niche employment market. The first Thai graduate in oenology has returned from Australia and is already producing remarkable results. More will follow and there may be a distant future where wine making is added to the skills offered by local universities and research on yeast will focus on wine.

The words of Visooth Lohitnavy of GranMonte Winery perhaps best sums up the future, "*I think the total consumption of Thai wine locally is less than 5%...so some people would say that we can't fight with imports. I would say that we have 95% opportunity.*"

Terry Commins  
Editor