Urban Grape Growing and Wine Production

Kaitlyn Mardeusz

The city of Detroit boasts a total of nearly 140 square miles within its limits. Of the 140 square miles, approximately 40 of them consist of vacant land. Whether in the form of abandoned homes, shut-down businesses, or open fields, a necessity exists to put this land to use.

“We must use innovative approaches to transform our vacant land in ways that increase its value and productivity and promote long-term sustainability. We must use our open space to improve the health of all Detroit residents.”

With the rise of urban agriculture in many American cities, Detroit has a prime opportunity to take advantage of its open area. Specifically, city residents can begin to look into the idea of grape growing and wine production. Taking a spin off of the traditional concept of farming in an urban environment, individuals can utilize Detroit’s vacant land to plant grape vines. As some microbreweries in the city brew their own beer, these grapes can ultimately be used for wine production.

This new venture brings both positives and negatives. Although challenges exist with grape production in the city, the opportunities and benefits that accompany it provide an incentive for Detroiters to consider this a viable use for their open space.

PROS

- Fresh and Local Produce
  - Growing grapes in the city offers a freshness that exists with local farming. Whether sold in a market, as part of menu items in a restaurant, or utilized in wine production, grape growing is another opportunity for city residents.

- Business Opportunities
  - Grape production opens the door for individuals to sell the grapes fresh, manufacture jellies and jams, juices, and possibly wine if the resources are available to do so.

- Increase in Property Values
  - By maintaining a small farm for grape growing, the value of land surrounding the previously vacant lot has the potential to increase. Furthermore, the addition of the grapevines improves the appearance of the neighborhood. Finally, there is an appeal that exists with property that includes the capabilities to produce wine along with a large cellar to store the locally produced wine.

• Bring People into the City
  o The appeal of a local winery in a city can help bring people to Detroit. Wine tasting, selling, and small tours of how the wine is produced throws a twist on urban farming and provides visitors with a new reason to come downtown.

• Spacious Lots
  o In order to manufacture the grapes and possibly produce wine, space is needed. With the vast areas of vacant lots in Detroit, the city has potential to offer this form of urban agriculture.

• Sustainable Use of Land
  o With the emergence of focusing on “green” businesses, utilizing the vacant land for farming would offer a sustainable use that is environmentally friendly.

• Chances to Make a Difference
  o By farming locally, individuals can offer their grapes to any local food banks or homeless shelters to do good deeds for those in need in the city.

CONS

• Chance the wine turns out poorly
  o Given the fact that wine is not often produced by growing grapes in an urban environment, one must be vigilant as to the quality of their grapes to ensure a good batch is harvested

• Compliance with City Codes
  o City planners have designated uses for each area of land located in Detroit; it becomes a necessity to ensure grape production and wine-making comply with the land use ordinances set for that particular space

• Facing Unhappy Neighbors
  o Not everyone will appreciate a vacant lot being utilized for farming; this may never become an issue, but hopefully neighbors will appreciate this use of the once empty or abandoned space

• Environmental Poisoning & Urban Pests
  o There is a possibility that due to past dumping, the ground sought to be used for farming may be tainted; it is imperative to test the soil before beginning to farm the land
  o Rodent extermination procedures may be required to remove animals that reside in an urban environment, such as rats or raccoons to ensure grapes are not destroyed or eaten before they reach maturation

• Necessity to Stay Vigilant
  o With production of grapes for wine comes the responsibility of watching the vines. This simply implies that if one ventures to start this type of urban farming, he or she must be ready to tend to the grapes, applying sprays when needed, being aware of frosts when they hit, or watch for mold that may grow on grape leaves
Helpful Links

The following links provide useful information to readers regarding urban grape growing. These links also outline various opportunities for land uses in Detroit.

Urban Sustainable Living: http://www.urbansustainableliving.com/growing-grapes-for-vines.html

Legal Considerations

Grape Growing

- When producing grapes through urban farming, it is important to check the zoning applicable to different areas in the city to ensure this use of the land is allowed. The following are links that indicate the zoning in Detroit.
  - Detroit City Codes: http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=10649
  - General Land Planning and Zoning Information: http://www.urbanaglaw.org/planning-and-zoning/

Wine Growing

- There are specific steps that must be taken in order to produce wine for commercial purposes. The following are links to the permits required at the federal and state level for winery maintenance.
  - State Level (Winery Permit): http://www.michigan.gov/statelicensesearch/0,4671,7-180-24786_24829-81648--,00.html