

Idaho wine industry getting international attention

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CALDWELL -- Most of us have been there. When you travel outside the state, and you tell people you're from Idaho, they say, 'Oh, famous potatoes.' While Idaho does have famous potatoes, some people are hoping that another Idaho product gets national and international acclaim. And, it's already started.

Greg Koenig has been the owner and winemaker at Koenig Vineyards in Caldwell for about 18 years. Many of those were pretty lean, as far as perception of Idaho wine.

The biggest problem for Greg, like many other winemakers in Idaho, has nothing to do with the wine they make. It's has to do with the perception of the wine they make.

Small wineries in Idaho have had a hard time over the years finding distributors outside of the state, because so few people realize that Idaho is a quality wine-growing region, said Koenig.

But, that could be changing, with the July edition of Wine Spectator. It's the biggest publication in our industry, said Koenig. And, what they say about wine carries a whole lot of weight.

What Wine Spectator said, was that three wines from Koenig Vineyards deserved a 90 and two 91 ratings. No Idaho wines have ever received 90-plus ratings from Wine Spectator.

It means that people are going to be taking a closer look at us, said Moya Shatz Dolsby, the executive director of the Idaho Wine Commission.

Dolsby says these ratings are huge to get Koenig and the entire Idaho Wine Region the recognition, and then distribution, they deserve. These wines are winning awards, they have good price points, and it's just amazing the quality of the wines. The wines are really, really good! Comparing the wines to other regions, why wouldn't you buy local?

We've been around long enough to have seen some tough times, and we always had faith that Idaho could grow some really great grapes, said Koenig. We're just excited about where the Idaho wine industry is headed.

Koenig says he's already getting a lot more calls about his wine, from places as far away as Hong Kong, and especially about the three wines that were rated. In fact, one is already close to selling out.

Wine Enthusiast, another well-respected publication also had a recent feature on the entire Idaho Wine Region.

Back in 2008, a study found that the Idaho wine industry had a \$73 million economic impact.

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