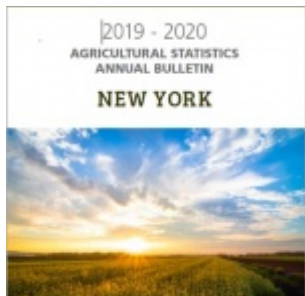


# Viewpoint

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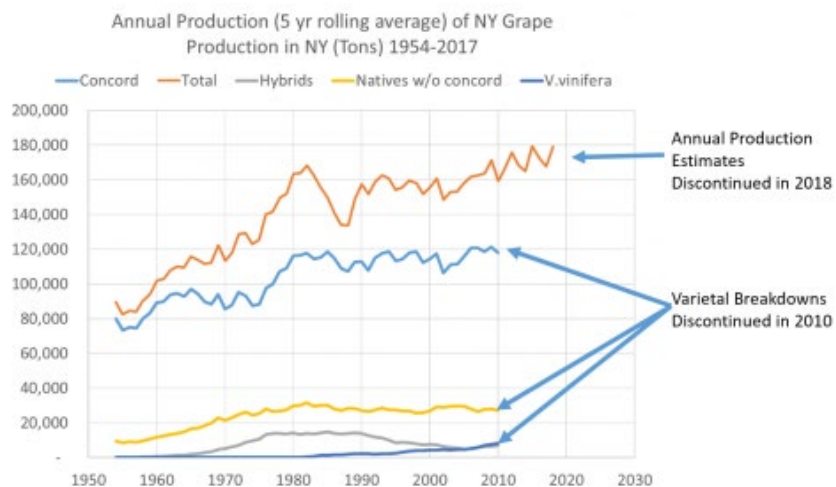
## Disappearing Crop Statistics

### *The USDA Drops New York Grapes from Annual Crop Statistical Summaries*

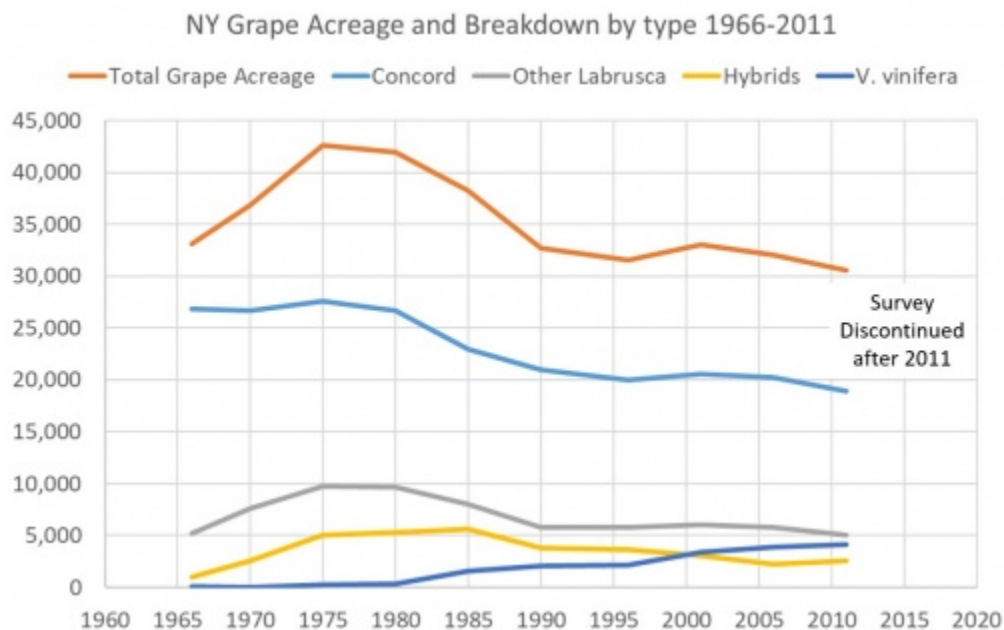
By Tim Martinson and Sam Filler

How big was the 2020 grape crop in New York? How much did the spring frost lower yields in 2020 in the Finger Lakes? How many acres of Concord or Riesling are in production? How has this changed over the past five years?

These questions, once easily resolved by reference to survey information collected by the [USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service](#) (NASS), can no longer be answered. NASS stopped collecting annual grape production statistics in 2018 (**Figure 1**), and discontinued the five-year detailed 'Vineyard and Orchard Acreage Survey' in 2011 (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 1.** Five-year rolling average of annual production of grapes in New York, 1954-2017. With variety type (Concord, Native Labrusca types, hybrids and *V. vinifera*) breakdowns, discontinued after 2010.



**Figure 2.** Vineyard acreage and variety type from 5-year Vineyard and Orchard surveys conducted by NASS-NY, 1966-2011.

The latest version of the [New York Agricultural Statistics Annual Bulletin](#), released last fall, lists grape acreage for 2015, 2016, and 2017, but only (NA) for 2018 and 2019. The USDA’s [Noncitrus Fruits and Nuts 2019](#) summary lists only acreage and tonnage produced in California (860,000 acres; 7.1 million tons) and Washington state (75,000 acres, 466,000 tons). Statistics from eight other states (Oregon, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, Missouri, and Ohio) were also dropped.

### Why annual production statistics were discontinued

NASS statisticians review the crop statistics program every five years. The most recent [program review in 2017](#), signaled a change in emphasis, from covering all significant crop production to only including those states that accounted for the majority of production:

*“For each crop, both production and total value of production were reviewed. Totals were arrayed from largest to smallest. States that account for the largest proportion of the total were identified for inclusion in the annual estimating program. This allows us to provide the most useful data to the agricultural sector in the most efficient means possible given the limited available resources.”* ([Program review, Non-citrus nuts and fruits, March 2019](#))

In practice, this seems to mean that the goal was to cover only the states accounting for 90% of annual production. In grapes, the 90% threshold was met by including only California and Washington. Yet in apples, this process resulted in inclusion of Virginia, with 3% of the apple acreage, and 10,000 acres in production – less than one-third of the acreage in grapes in New York (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Comparison of acreage of grapes and apples in top 10 states in the 2017 Non-citrus fruit and nuts survey. Crop estimates in states highlighted in **red** discontinued after 2017.

Rank	Grape Acreage 2017			Apple Acreage 2017		
	State	Acreage	% of total	State	Acreage	% of total
1	California	829,000	83%	Washington	165,000	55%
2	Washington	73,000	7%	New York	43,600	15%
3	<b>New York</b>	<b>33,000</b>	<b>3%</b>	Michigan	33,000	11%
4	<b>Oregon</b>	<b>23,000</b>	<b>2%</b>	Pennsylvania	20,000	7%
5	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>13,000</b>	<b>1%</b>	Virginia	10,000	3%
6	<b>Michigan</b>	<b>12,500</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>5,200</b>	<b>2%</b>
7	<b>Texas</b>	<b>4,600</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>Oregon</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>2%</b>
8	<b>Virginia</b>	<b>4,200</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>West Virginia</b>	<b>4,800</b>	<b>2%</b>
9	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>Ohio</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>1%</b>
10	<b>Missouri</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>1%</b>
Total		996,300		Total	294,600	

## Consequences

The discontinuation of annual production statistics for New York grapes has several consequences:

- With only CA and WA represented, there is no coverage of grape production in any eastern state, nor in other prominent states with increasing production such as Oregon.
- NASS has made a decision that 33,000 acres of grapes in New York are less worthy of inclusion in national statistics than 10,000 acres of apples in Virginia.
- Exclusion of New York grapes means that about half of the Concord and Niagara juice grape production is not represented in national statistics.
- Within New York, grapes are the second largest fruit and vegetable crop by acreage and value, with annual production valued at \$69 million in 2017. Yet annual production statistics are still in place for crops with comparable or lower acreage and value, including snap beans (31,000 acres \$38 M), sweet corn (28,000 acres \$40M), potatoes (14,000 acres, \$47M) and tart cherries (1,600 acres, \$0.7M).
- The five-year Census of Agriculture, last compiled in 2017, is the only remaining statistical summary of farms and acreage by county in New York. The data includes only acreage by county, but no breakdowns by variety or region are included – and no estimates whatsoever of production.

The current situation is this: The only information NASS is collecting in New York is how many farms and acres of grapes are planted in NY, with updates only every five years.

## The Need for Current and Updated Information

The Census of Agriculture alone cannot provide the New York industry with the information it needs, including annual production, and which grape varieties are planted where. Census of Agriculture figures cannot tell us how different sectors of NY grape and wine production are changing.

- The Census of Agriculture provides no information on the relative breakdown between the juice grape (Concord and Niagara) and wine grape sectors.
- Varieties used for wine production are continuing to change. Notably the relative acreage of non-Concord Labrusca varieties and traditional “French hybrid” varieties has declined, while acreage planted to new hybrid wine and *V. vinifera* varieties has increased. The Census of Agriculture will not provide information about these changes in varieties.
- Annual changes in tonnage, increasingly related to climate change, including dramatic yield reduction due to spring frost episodes in 2020 in the Finger Lakes, will not be captured in annual production estimates.
- Significant new plantings in non-traditional areas, with new varieties, will not be captured in agricultural statistics.

The industry needs both annual production estimates and periodic acreage breakdowns by variety to capture the dynamic industry changes and plan for the future.

Since the last acreage survey in 2011, the number of New York licensed wineries has increased 65% from 285 to 471. Trade publications are increasingly covering NY wine production. For example, Wine Enthusiast Magazine recognized New York as its “Wine Region of the Year” in 2014. The juice grape market suffered from stagnant markets and low prices after 2011, but has since rebounded with demand increasing, a new processor entering the field, and the prospect of higher grape prices. Because of the lack of production and acreage updates since 2011, these trends in the juice grape market were not captured. Statistics that document changes in acreage and production are an integral part of the industry’s marketing and recognition efforts. The industry’s continued growth requires the reinstatement of periodic vineyard acreage surveys to obtain detailed data, statistics, and information necessary to monitor the dynamic industry changes taking place and the driving forces behind them.

The 2011 vineyard survey no longer accurately reflects current conditions. Reinstatement of annual production and acreage surveys will assist New York State and the New York Wine and Grape Foundation in better prioritizing funding for marketing and research. This data will also support the private industry in making investment decisions in acquiring more vineyards, deciding what varieties to plant and where to plant them, deciding what varieties to remove, and for benchmarking our growth compared to other grape growing regions.

More importantly, in order to remain competitive with other US grape growing region, there needs to be a regular update of acreage and annual production. Since 1976, the California grape growers have conducted an annual production survey in partnership with NASS and CDFA. It is known as the “California Crush Report” and the report contains information on new plantings and removals of grapes, new plantings and removals of grapes, and tonnage and pricing information for grapes. The Oregon Wine Board has published an annual “Crush Report” since 2005, and the Virginia Vineyard Association

has conducted an annual commercial grape report since 2004. The data collected by these regions supports their researching and marketing priorities, and guides continued private investment into their industries.

## **Reinstating Production and Acreage Surveys**

For over 70 years, annual production surveys and periodic acreage surveys have tracked significant changes in the NY Wine and Grape industry (see [How vineyard acreage and varieties in New York have changed since the mid 1950's](#)). Funding constraints and changing governmental policies have driven the reduction in survey data collection and staffing at both the federal and state levels. Detailed acreage and production surveys that once were supported by state, federal, and industry partnerships have disappeared. It is time to look for ways to reinstate these important surveys. Accurate and unbiased estimates of varietal composition and production are needed to document and plan for the industry's future and support marketing efforts for NY grapes and wine.

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