

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



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**Michigan Wineries Now Have Their Own Industry Benchmarking Program**

**TRAVERSE CITY, MI** - May 5, 2015 – North Coast Ag Advisors, GreenStone Farm Credit Services and Farm Credit East are pleased to announce the launch of the Michigan Winery & Vineyard Benchmark Program for Michigan winery and vineyard owners and managers. GreenStone is the sponsoring underwriter of the program while Farm Credit East provides the technology tools for data analysis.

A first of its kind in Michigan, the program is designed for winery and vineyard business owners and managers to help them better understand their competitive position in the marketplace, provide insight into industry trends and assess the financial implications of their growing, wine-making and marketing strategies, decisions and practices.

Jim Casler, President of North Coast Ag Advisors comments, "This program helps continue to launch Michigan forward as a world-class wine-producing region. The West Coast has long had industry benchmark programs like this. Now is Michigan's time."

North Coast Ag Advisors serves as the primary contact for winery and vineyard owners and managers; collecting and analyzing business data, conducting an annual conference and performing one-on-one review sessions with each participating winery and vineyard.

"As the fourth largest producer of grapes in the nation, it's time for Michigan winery owners, the investment community and the industry at-large to have access to Michigan specific data to help best understand the industry and help it grow. As a sponsor of the program, we've committed ourselves to better understanding this industry to help support our members." says Tyson Lemon, GreenStone vice president of commercial lending.

Eligibility for participation is based on the winery's ability to provide accurate financial and operational information about their business. In order to maintain program participant confidentiality, all data is scrubbed of any identifying information and then analyzed to determine financial ratios, operating efficiency and other key performance indicators. The data from all

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program participants is then gathered together to produce an annual industry report. An annual conference is held to share the findings, followed-up with one-on-one consultations with each winery.

Gregg McConnell directs the North East winery benchmark for Farm Credit East, ACA. Gregg explains “We’re excited to provide the technology to get the Michigan Winery Benchmark going with our colleagues Greenstone Farm Credit and North Coast Ag. The program has been a great assistance to wineries in the North East for the past 7 years, and now through collaboration the impact is expanding to Michigan. A key to its success is confidentiality, and North Coast Ag will provide strict confidentiality which is important to winery owners.”

Casler further adds, "The information in the annual report and the individualized follow-up analysis is not easy for the average winery owner to obtain. In fact, it's been almost impossible until now. Since most of the 100-plus wineries in Michigan are privately owned, the information just isn't out there like it would be if they were all public companies."

Linda Jones, Executive Director of the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council provided "Our office must receive at least half a dozen inquiries a year for this kind of information. I am guessing that several of Michigan's winery and vineyard owners will take advantage of this program."

The Michigan Winery Benchmark Program is now officially launched and will continue for at least the next three years. A goal is to attract at least a 20 percent participation rate with all eligible wineries and vineyards.

For more details and qualification information, visit [www.JimCasler.com/wine](http://www.JimCasler.com/wine).

### **About the North Coast Ag Advisors**

*North Coast Ag Advisors, based in Traverse City, Michigan, is an advisory firm specializing in work with small and medium-sized family-owned farms and agribusiness companies with business planning, financial management, succession planning and is home to the Michigan Winery Benchmark Program©. Jim Casler, President, has 24 years of experience in financial analysis, business management and real estate. More information can be found at [www.JimCasler.com](http://www.JimCasler.com).*

### **About Farm Credit East**

*Farm Credit East extends more than \$4.3 billion in loans and has 19 local offices in its six-state service area including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey. In addition to loans and leases, the organization also offers a full range of agriculturally specific financial services for businesses related to farming, horticulture, forestry and commercial fishing. Farm Credit East is governed by a 17-person board of directors from across the Northeast. More information can be found at [www.farmcrediteast.com](http://www.farmcrediteast.com).*

### **About GreenStone Farm Credit Services**

*GreenStone Farm Credit Services, based in East Lansing, Michigan, is Michigan and northeast Wisconsin's largest agricultural lender and the country's sixth largest association in the Farm*

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*Credit System. A member-owned cooperative, GreenStone owns and manages approximately \$6.9 billion in assets and serves more than 23,000 members with 36 branch locations in Michigan and northeast Wisconsin. More information on GreenStone can be found at [www.greenstonefcs.com](http://www.greenstonefcs.com).*

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