

## VESTA Student Profile- Greg Gordy

By Emily Gray

When most people think of retirement, starting a brand new career is not what normally comes to mind. However, when VESTA student Greg Gordy retired from the Air Force in 2010, he already had a plan of what he'd like to do, which included planting his own vineyard and developing a strategy of how to open his own winery.

Gordy planted his vineyard in 2007. He planted all black muscadine grapes on his property in the small town he grew up, Ringgold, GA. This year marks his second commercial harvest and Gordy has plans to double his cultivated acreage over the next few years. Currently, his vineyard produces approximately 10 tons on four acres. Gordy has also started making plans to open a small winery on the property within the next five years. In the meantime, he will continue to sell the majority of his grapes to a semi-local winery.



Greg Gordy's Vineyard, Ringgold, GA

Gordy's interest in viticulture began when he was stationed in the wine-producing region in Germany. He realized he needed a plan for the future when he retired and returned to the U.S. At the time, Gordy had the feeling that he was ready for a significant lifestyle change and thought that starting a vineyard would be a new and fun venture, and he already had the land.

VESTA came into the picture when Gordy attended the Wineries Unlimited Trade Show and visited the VESTA booth. He began taking courses and increasing his knowledge of both viticulture and enology. Though Gordy has never had an interest in looking for positions in the grape and wine industry, he is confident that the knowledge he has gained through his classes would help should he ever decide to pursue one.

Throughout his VESTA career, Gordy has taken specific interest in the chemistry of winemaking. He notes that two courses, Wine and Must Analysis and Wine Microbiology, have been particularly beneficial. Gordy states, "I have learned that making wine is all about microbe management – fostering the ones you want and inhibiting the ones you don't. And, a lot of that comes from understanding the chemistry. So, even if you choose to outsource a lot of the analysis, you still have to understand it."

Thanks to Gordy's hands-on experience in working in his own vineyard, he is able to offer some advice to other VESTA students. He believes it is important to not get caught up in the romance and intrigue of winemaking in order to successfully operate on a commercial scale. Gordy also stresses that there are two important points to understand that he has been told numerous times by winemakers and winery owners: "First, it is a lot of work. You can't be lazy and you can't be uneducated about the process. Second, it is a business. You may be having fun and you may be making good wine, but that doesn't mean you're making money."

Despite everything Gordy has learned through VESTA, he finds that the opportunity to meet and visit with various people of the grape and wine industry has been one of the most rewarding aspects of his decision to open a vineyard and soon-to-be winery. He believes that instructors, industry professionals, and other VESTA students have all contributed to his learning experience both inside and out of the virtual classroom.