

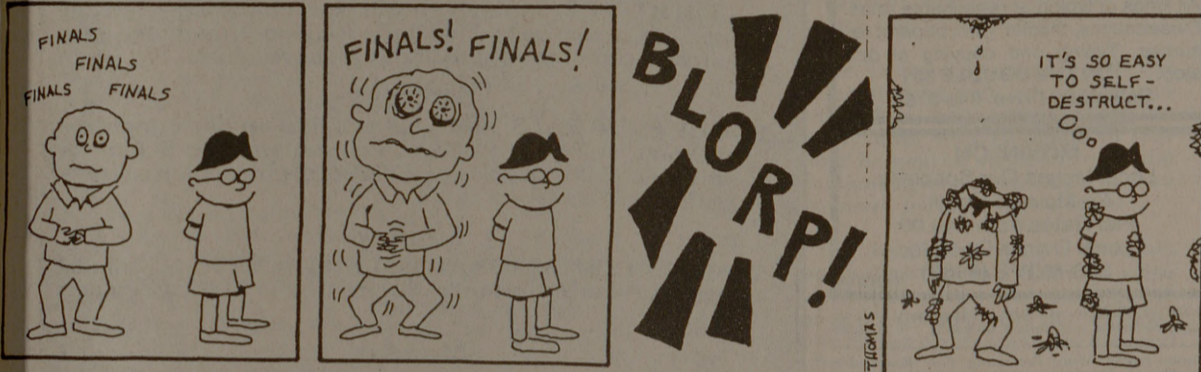
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Ag commissioner declares Texas wines coming of age

AUSTIN (AP) — Out in the Texas countryside among the cotton, cows and cactus is something new and exciting — wine grapes, says state Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower.

The wine industry in Texas has advanced to the point where the agriculture department Thursday released the "Texas Wine Country Guide," which describes 16 Texas wineries.

"An increasing number of small, premium wineries are beginning to produce the next big thing from Texas: superb wines," Hightower says.

"These are not novelty bottlings of 'Chateau Bubba,' but fine vintages

from the hands of a new breed of Texas winemakers who are intent on achieving the highest world standards of wine production."

In 1975, Hightower says, Texas had only one winery. A decade later 16 were producing wine, and others have entered into production just this year since the guide was printed.

"When it's fully 'uncorked,' the Texas wine industry will mean \$3 billion a year to our state's economy," Hightower says.

The department guide says winemaking in Texas probably was introduced in the state by Spanish missionaries in 1662, 100 years before California got grapes. Texas had 25

wineries by 1900, but then along came Prohibition. By the time it was repealed, only one winery — Val Verde at Del Rio — remained.

A total of 50,000 gallons of Texas wine was bottled in 1982, 160,000 in 1983, 340,000 in 1984 and about 500,000 in 1985.

"Already, Texas vintages are receiving laurels and awards from connoisseurs and competitors throughout the world," Hightower says. "These grape growers and winemakers are bringing the most modern viticultural practices and top enologists to their enterprise, blending world winemaking expertise with the rich natural resources and entrepreneurial spirit of Texas," he says.

Hermann Estate trial jury still deliberating

HOUSTON (AP) — A jury entered its second day of deliberations Thursday in the trial of a former Hermann Hospital Estate trustee accused of selling stock to a charitable hospital foundation at inflated prices.

Jurors must decide 44 special issues in the complex case that concerns about 40 stock transactions.

The estate is seeking \$2.8 million from former trustee John Coffee; his wife, Dorothy; and Neill Amsler Jr., a former estate executive, alleging that they conspired to sell stock from two corporations affiliated with Coffee. The estate claims the stocks were bought without the full knowledge and consent of trustees.

Coffee testified he made

money on some of the transactions.

However, Coffee's attorney James Leahy said Coffee was being used as a scapegoat "to take the heat off" the estate, which had been under investigation after allegations of self-dealing and theft among employees and trustees.

Leahy said Coffee attempted to repay the estate \$351,940, but trustees refused to accept the money.

Estate attorney Tom Alexander said Coffee had offered the money in exchange for a "full release on what he might have done, but he wouldn't specify what was done."

Texas-based bank to cut energy loans

HOUSTON (AP) — First City Bancorporation of Texas will no longer loan a high percentage of its money to the energy industry, bank officials vowed at their annual stockholders meeting Thursday.

The Houston-based holding company lost \$232.4 million, or \$7.27 per share, in net income in the first quarter. The company lost \$58.1 million in energy loan write-offs in the first quarter.

But much of the substantial first quarter's loss was accounted for by First City moving \$275 million into a reserve for potential loan defaults, said Daniel Arnold, board chairman and president.

By the end of March, energy loans accounted for 17.8 percent of all loans compared to a high of 26 percent three years ago, Arnold said.

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