

Amplified research efforts in 2016 widely considered a success, but there is more to be done.

Hansen: A focus on wine research

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As the first year of the Washington wine industry's amplified research program is now behind us, it's important to look back at what we accomplished and more importantly — how to move forward from here.

In short, we accomplished a lot, even more than I envisioned when I began the role as the first research program manager for the Washington State Wine Commission.

Much of this initial progress is due to the well-defined goals of the Strategic Research Plan for the Washington Wine Industry, developed for the Wine Commission over the course of several years with broad industry involvement.

The plan identified strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of the industry's current research program, but mostly, it laid out a vision and roadmap for a world-class research program.

Washington's wine industry has had a research partnership with Washington State University for decades.

Viticulture and enology research has been conducted in the state since in the late 1930s when Walter Clore joined WSU and planted wine grape trials throughout the state, and Chas Nagel turned the grapes into wine.

The research program has grown significantly, and last year provided grants totaling \$870,000.

The program is funded by a unique mix of private, industry and state sources that include the Wine Commission, Auction of Washington Wines, state liter tax collected on all wine sold and the WSU-Agriculture Research Center. Each entity contributes about 25 percent of the total funding.

Today, the research partnership is even stronger, evident by the Washington wine industry's \$7.4 million investment that helped build the wine science center at WSU's Tri-Cities campus in Richland.

Raise awareness

While there has been an effective, ongoing research effort for many years, the strategic plan identified a lack of industry awareness of research and uncertainty of the value of research as the program's main weaknesses. Thus, my primary goal in 2016 was to raise industry awareness of research and its value.

A Washington Sate University study on wildfire smoke on wine grapes in 2016.

 (TJ Mullinax/Good Fruit Grower file photo)

As I crisscrossed the state and shared the Wine Commission's research vision with nearly every statewide and regional winery association group, I found great interest in research.

From Lake Chelan to the Columbia Gorge and the Walla Walla Valley, I met wine grape growers and vintners — many of whom are new to the industry — seeking science-based tools to help meet pest and disease challenges to produce the highest quality wine.

A comprehensive, industry wide research survey was administered by the Wine Commission last spring to identify how to best communicate research information to industry and gain broader input in setting research priorities. The survey results guided the Wine Commission's communication efforts in 2016:

—Submitted 25 research articles and news releases (published in trade magazines such as Good Fruit Grower, newspapers, radio, and electronic newsletters of Wine Business Daily News, and more).

—Co-sponsored with WSU the inaugural research seminar WAVE (Washington Advancements in Viticulture and Enology), which was a tremendous success with a sellout crowd of 80.

—Guided development of organizational structure, research process and succession plan for Wine Research Advisory Committee (research review arm of industry).

—Developed a research page on Wine Commission's website to share information and archive reports.

—Shared research program and vision with 18 state, regional, and federal stakeholder groups and entities.

—Developed return on investment infographic for industry outreach efforts.

—Represented Washington's wine industry at a Washington, D.C., research reception, meeting with federal agencies to identify research grant opportunities.

—Increased industry attendance at annual research review (Jan. 18-19, 2017).

An annual report of the Wine Commission's research program can be found at:

www.washingtonwine.org/research/reports.

Great progress to raise industry awareness of research and its value was made last year, however, more work is needed.

In 2017, strategic research communication efforts will continue with editorial outreach emphasis to trade publications and local media (radio and newspaper). Another industry research survey will be administered in the spring to review research priorities and measure industry awareness of research. Also, look for condensed research outcomes to be published in the Wine Commission's monthly newsletter.

The second annual WAVE will be April 19 at the Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center in Prosser. Two condensed sessions, WAVEx, are scheduled for July 11 in Walla Walla and July 13 in Woodinville. To register for WAVE, visit www.washingtonwine.org/research/wave.

Guiding objective

The strategic plan provides foundational elements that deal with things like framework, sustainable funding, scoping, and managing the efforts. But what's missing is the overall research objective.

A research objective is needed to guide the overall thrust of research and development. This is different than the industry's research priorities that drive projects submitted by researchers and are updated annually.

Objectives are a key part of federal grant funding requests, a finding I learned while meeting with federal grant program administrators.

The tree fruit industry's technology roadmap goal set in the early 2000s of reducing production costs of its highest quality fruit by 30 percent by the year 2010 is an example of an effective research program objective.

Work to craft the research objective will start this spring.

The Wine Commission's Research Committee and Wine Research Advisory Committee will lead the effort and seek broad industry involvement, with input from the research community, to develop an objective that serves as the guiding light for the wine industry's viticulture and enology research program.

The research objective, with short- and long-term objectives, will be the "North Star" of Washington's viticulture and enology research program. This timely step is needed as the industry seeks outside funding to help ramp up research efforts. We invite industry members — growers, winemakers and the research community — to join this process! •

– A Good Fruit Grower Good to Know by Melissa Hansen, the research program manager for the Washington State Wine Commission and former associate editor of Good Fruit Grower. Contact her at mhansen@washingtonwine.org to learn how you can participate.

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