

PROGRESS EDITION MARCH 22, 2016 10:33 PM

Washington Wine Commission: Wine industry grows its research commitment

HIGHLIGHTS

New WSU Wine Science Center a significant step up for industry

Development of industrywide strategic research plan another encouraging sign

Pesticide use already has been drastically reduced





BY MELISSA HANSEN

Research Program Manager

Winemaking is art and science. Thanks to research supported by Washington State's wine industry, growers use an array of science-based tools that help conserve irrigation water and practice integrated pest management (IPM) to control pests. Meanwhile, winemakers use other tools to continue to produce some of the highest quality wines in the world.

Research is a growing focus of Washington State Wine, the research and marketing arm for the state's grape growers and wineries. Nearly a quarter of the state wine agency's \$5 million budget will be spent on viticulture and enology research in 2016, including its pledge to fund a portion of the construction of the new wine science facility at the Washington State University Tri-Cities campus.

The state's wine industry significantly stepped up its research commitment when it dedicated \$7.4 million to help build the Ste. Michelle Wine Estates WSU Wine Science Center. The \$23 million facility, with classrooms, laboratories and research winery, is outfitted with some of the most technologically advanced equipment available.

The sizable industry investment, paid through assessments from the state's grape growers and vintners, is a major component of the industry's efforts to build a world-class research program.

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DEVELOPING A WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH PROGRAM TAKES MORE THAN A STATE-OF-THE-ART BUILDING. IT TAKES VISION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING.

But developing a world-class research program takes more than a state-of-the-art building. It takes vision and strategic planning.

Strategic planning

A broad group of Washington growers, winemakers and industry representatives provided input to help develop a strategic research plan for Washington State Wine. The planning process took more than two years. The plan identified, among many things, the need to expand and elevate the research program so that the industry is aware of research successes, and how that research can benefit them and is supportive of future efforts.

I was hired in November — the first research program manager for Washington State Wine — to implement the strategic research plan.

Washington's wine industry has grown rapidly in the past 20 years. The industry comprises an estimated 50,000 acres of wine grapes, nearly 900 wineries, and produces in excess of 16 million cases of wine annually. The most recent economic impact study, conducted for Washington State Wine last year, reported \$4.8 billion in total economic impact.

As a fruit crop, wine grapes are third in value behind apples and cherries.

Valuable research

The effect of industry-supported research is felt by growers, winemakers and Washingtonians.

Research has helped winemakers to better understand fruit ripening, manage tannins during winemaking and keep wines free of spoilage defects, all which result in premium wines to be enjoyed by consumers. The use of environmentally kind farming practices by growers, a result of research, helps preserve the state's water, land and air resources.

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One significant example of research at work is how WSU scientists, with industry support and funding, have helped growers reduce pesticide use by 80 percent from 1995-2005, according to WSU. The increased use of IPM is good for the environment and vineyard workers. Growers selectively target pests and use computer models that monitor temperature, humidity and moisture to improve control of diseases like powdery mildew.

Another example of industry-supported research with wide-ranging impact is deficit irrigation, a technique used primarily in red wine grape varieties that uses less than full irrigation at key stages to stress the vine. Deficit irrigation has been adopted by nearly all growers in the state as a way to boost fruit and wine quality.

An added bonus is that it conserves about 30 percent in water savings. Because Eastern Washington vineyards receive little rainfall during the growing season, growers can manage irrigation timing and amounts to limit canopy growth, better expose fruit to sunlight, and stress the vine to produce small berries, all associated with premium wine.

Past research helped put Washington's young wine industry on the global wine map. But there are new challenges, such as grapevine-threatening diseases and the ever-competitive wine market that demands quality.

It's time to start the journey, follow the strategic roadmap and build a world-class research program.

ABOUT WASHINGTON STATE WINE

Washington State Wine, also known as the Washington State Wine Commission (WSWC), represents every licensed winery and wine grape grower in the state. Guided by an appointed board, the mission of the WSWC is, "On behalf of the state of Washington and its wineries and growers, the



mission of the Washington State Wine Commission is to raise awareness and der Washington State wine through marketing and education while supporting vitici research to drive industry growth.”

Funded almost entirely by the industry through assessments based on grape and WSWC is a state government agency, established by the legislature in 1987.

To learn more, visit www.washingtonwine.org.



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