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USDA ARS Moves Forward with Smoke Exposure Research
ARS Funds Collaborative Research Effort with State Land Grant Universities

April 29, 2020 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is partnering with federal and state research institutions in California, Oregon and Washington on a collaborative \$2 million research effort to address important wildfire issues affecting grape production areas.

West Coast winegrowing associations involved in a task force, focused on wildfire smoke issues, led the effort to obtain federal funding for ARS to support grape smoke exposure research. ARS has committed those funds to a collaborative research effort involving the University of California-Davis, Oregon State University and Washington State University.

The West Coast Smoke Task Force was formed by industry leaders and three West Coast winegrowing associations: California Association of Winegrape Growers, Oregon Wine Board and Washington Winegrowers. Four industry representatives – Alisa Jacobson, Joel Gott Wines; Patrick Rawn, Two Mountain Winery; Mike Testa, Central Coast Vineyard Care; and Gregg Hibbits, Mesa Vineyard Management – are working through these associations to coordinate industry efforts to address a range of industry and economic issues associated with smoke exposed grapes. Other groups involved in the effort include the Oregon Winegrowers Association and Wine Institute.

Since 2011, increasingly frequent and severe wildfires in California, Oregon and Washington have caused significant disruption and economic losses for grape growers. The negative impacts of smoke exposure on wine quality is an industry-wide concern.

Climate change models predict increased wildfire risks in the Western United States, which threatens the long-term sustainability of important winegrowing regions. To combat the increased risks of wildfire smoke to grape value and wine quality, researchers will focus on developing and proving new risk assessment tools, mitigation measures and management strategies for use in vineyards and wineries.

ARS researchers, in collaboration with colleagues at the three land grant institutions, will address components of the yearly life cycle of wildfire impacts on winegrape production, including:

- Smoke exposure in the vineyard
- Chemical changes in grapes and wines
- Consumer perception of smoke taint

The \$2 million in new ARS funds will be allocated as follows:

- \$700,000 to the USDA-ARS, Davis
- \$300,000 to UC Davis collaborator Anita Oberholster
- \$400,000 to USDA-ARS, Corvallis
- \$300,000 to OSU collaborator Elizabeth Tomasino
- \$300,000 to WSU collaborator Tom Collins

Researchers will start using ARS funds for research this summer and they plan to provide regular updates to the industry.

“Congress, the Agricultural Research Service and winegrowing organizations from the states most affected by wildfires really did a great job to obtain \$2 million in research funding for smoke exposure issues,” said associate professor Elizabeth Tomasino, Oregon State University. “And, I know those efforts are ongoing. With more funding, I’m certain this collaborative research effort can deliver new tools and techniques to help growers and wineries reduce smoke exposure related losses.”

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