

WEST COAST SMOKE EXPOSURE TASK FORCE

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West Coast University Scientists Receive \$7.65M Grant to Study Smoke Impact on Grapes and Wine

SACRAMENTO, Dec. 3, 2021 – A team of West Coast university researchers received a \$7.65 million grant to study the impact of smoke on grapes and wine. The research project is expected to produce new insights, strategies and tools to help winegrape growers and winemakers prevent or better manage the damage to grape quality and wine that can result when wildfire smoke events occur.

The four-year project is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crop Research Initiative. The project brings together ongoing state-based research programs into a strong, coordinated effort. Dr. Elizabeth Tomasino of Oregon State University, who serves as project director, is joined by Drs. Tom Collins of Washington State University and Anita Oberholster of the University of California, Davis. Project objectives were developed after the research team collected industry input during grant planning sessions held in California, Oregon and Washington.

Grape exposure to wildfire smoke can compromise the quality and value of winegrapes. Wildfires have been especially devastating for the West Coast, where California, Oregon and Washington are three of the nation's top four producing states. Since 2019, grape growers and wineries from these three states have worked together under the banner of the West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force to coordinate smoke impact research and industry education.

An economic analysis of the 2020 wildfires conducted by the Wine Institute estimated losses up to \$3.7 billion, a number that will be felt into 2021 because many wineries decided not to produce wine from 2020 grapes.

"This research is part of a larger story about how the West Coast winegrowing community is collaborating to address the profound challenges associated with wildfires and smoke events," California Association of Winegrape Growers President John Aguirre said. "I'm encouraged by the pace and quality of current and planned research projects."

West Coast grape growers and winemakers want to better understand how smoke density and composition affect grapes, grapevines, wine composition and sensory perception of the wine in a glass. The research team is calling this a "smoke to glass" understanding. With the grant, the research team will focus on:

- New technologies and sensor networks for real-time risk assessment of smoke in the vineyard.
- Smoke exposure impact on the quality and health of grapes and grapevines.
- Grape barriers/coatings to reduce or eliminate uptake of smoke components into grapes.
- Rapid tests to predict what a wine exposed to smoke will taste like when made into wine.
- Sensory quality thresholds of smoke compounds in wine.
- Predictive modeling of smoke risk to grape and wine quality from environmental, chemical and sensory data.
- Outreach and communication program to share findings with industry.

The work planned through the new grant builds on previous research by the same team made possible by funding from the Washington State Wine Commission, American Vineyard Foundation, Oregon Wine Board, Northwest Center for Small Fruits Research and USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

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