

# WSU wine scientists run studies to combat smoke exposure

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press



Tom Collins

RICHLAND, Wash. — As winegrape harvest approaches and wildfires rip across the West, Washington State University scientists are conducting new research to help growers prepare for — and combat — smoke exposure.

Last year's wildfire season left many Washington vineyards coated in ash and damaged by smoke, making many acres of winegrapes unharvestable.

This year, WSU researchers are trying to "get ahead" of the harvest and help growers prepare for smoke exposure. The scientists are running several projects this September, including installing air quality sensors in vineyards, exposing grapes to simulated smoke in the lab and using protective sprays on grapes.

"Our research program goes essentially from grape to glass," said Tom Collins, assistant professor at the WSU Wine Science Center. "We're looking at everything from what to do on the vineyard side to be better prepared, to when we start to bring the fruit in, tools we can use to change the winemaking process."

The first piece of WSU's research is preventive: using "barrier" sprays on grapes.

One type of barrier spray is made when researchers mix together water and kaolin clay, also known as white or china clay, and spray the solution on winegrapes.

Based on previous experiments, Collins said kaolin appears to absorb and hold smoke particles, protecting the grapes. Collins predicts that when researchers this fall spray down grapes with water right before harvesting, the barrier coating will run off, taking the particles with it and leaving clean grapes.

Another piece of WSU's research will involve monitoring air quality near vineyards and tracking smoke's movements through a

region. Currently, growers rely on Washington's air quality monitoring network, with air monitoring stations based in urban centers around the state. Although these stations are useful, Collins said, there aren't enough stations and they don't accurately monitor what's happening in rural areas where vineyards are.

This fall, funded by the Washington State Wine Commission and other groups, Collins' team is installing 14 air quality sensors in commercial vineyards throughout central Washington to collect smoke density information and airflow data. The researchers plan to install more sensors in the coming years. The goal is to create predictive models that warn growers about where smoke is worst and where it might be headed next.

The researchers are also studying direct smoke impacts. "We're trying to figure out how much smoke it takes for winegrapes to be at risk," said Layton Ashmore, a WSU doctoral candidate in food science. The researchers are studying how much smoke is harmful to grapes and smoke from what plants is worst — for example, comparing smoke from rangeland plants versus woodlands. "It's one of the most complicated issues to face the wine industry in a long time," said Melissa Hanson, research program director for the Washington State Wine Commission. "The impact of smoke on grapes depends on many factors, from length of time exposed, which variety, proximity to fire, type of material burning, freshness of the smoke, weather patterns and more."

Hanson said the wine industry has already learned a lot, but there's still much more to understand.

# Oregon timber company dips toe into wine

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

The potential for wildfires and stricter regulations has convinced an Oregon timber company to dip its toe into the wine industry.

Hampton Lumber of Portland has bought the Carlton Winemakers Studio from its founders for an undisclosed sum, building on earlier vineyard investments in Polk and Yamhill counties.

The studio operates as an incubator for independent winemakers who use the facility's equipment and sell products through its tasting room.

It was founded in 2002 by Eric Hamacher and Luisa Ponzi, who hailed from the wine industry, with the help of builders Ned and Kirsten Lumpkin.

The investment made more sense for Hampton than buying or developing a winery, which would entail specialized marketing expertise and holding several years worth of inventory, said Steve Zika, the company's CEO.

"This is a nice logical step where we could tip-toe into the next step," Zika said. "It's a really interesting way to get further into the

industry."

The opportunity for growth in Oregon's forest products industry is limited due to wildfire danger and likely regulatory changes on private lands, he said.

Timber companies are negotiating with environmental groups and Gov. Kate Brown's office on a potential "habitat conservation plan" for federally protected species on private lands, he said.

Vineyards and wine-making offer an opportunity to diversify for Hampton Lumber, though the timber industry will remain its main focus, Zika said. The com-

pany owns 280,000 acres of forestland in Oregon and Washington and operates 10 mills along the West Coast.

Earlier this year, Hampton roughly doubled its timberland holdings with the purchase of 145,000 acres in northwest Washington from the Weyerhaeuser Co. for about \$265 million.

Hampton entered the wine industry in 2016, when it planted a property near Monmouth with grapevines in anticipation of a land sale that ultimately fell through.

The company held on to the vineyard and bought another one near Carlton two years later. Grapes from

the two properties, which total about 130 acres, are sold to eight wineries in the area.

The wine industry may present opportunities for members of the Hampton family who want to pursue career paths outside the timber industry, Zika said. The family's involvement in timber stretches 80 years and four generations.

Since it's not a publicly held firm with a narrow focus, Hampton is flexible to make unique investments, he said. "We can do things like that in terms of fun as a private company."

# EFSC refuses to remove judge presiding over B2H project

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Oregon energy regulators have refused to remove an administrative law judge overseeing the dispute over the 300-mile Boardman-to-Hemingway transmission line project.

The transmission line proposal is currently in a "contested case proceeding," which is the final step before the state's Energy Facility Siting Council votes whether to approve it.

Farmers along the route have opposed the project for taking land out of production and disrupting agricultural practices, while other critics worry about impacts to wildlife, cultural and recreational values.

The transmission line would connect Boardman, Ore., with the Hemingway substation in southwestern Idaho, which the developer, Idaho Power, claims is necessary to meet consumer power demands.

The state's Department

of Energy recommended the project be authorized last year, triggering the contested case proceedings.

One of the project's opponents, Irene Gilbert of La Grande, Ore., sought to remove the administrative law judge in charge of the case, Alison Greene Webster, for alleged bias and incompetence in her decisions.

According to the request, the administrative judge didn't ensure opponents got a "full, fair and impartial hearing" or meet other legal requirements, and instead "ignored rules and statutes" to benefit Idaho Power and the state's

Department of Energy.

Gilbert claims the judge has issued "clearly prejudicial rulings" in favor of project supporters on forestland impacts and other issues while limiting the participation of project opponents in the proceedings.

"Ms. Webster has a track record that cannot continue to be ignored," Gilbert said during a recent EFSC hearing.

An attorney for Idaho Power urged EFSC to deny the request because Gilbert simply disagrees with rulings that were within the judge's authority but did not demonstrate prejudice or incompetence.

"She hasn't provided any legal argument as to why those decisions were wrong or how they show bias," said Lisa Rackner, the developer's attorney.

Jesse Ratcliffe, an attorney from the state's Department of Justice who's advising EFSC, said there's a high bar to prove an administrative judge should be removed due to bias.

None of the complaints in Gilbert's request rise to the level that would warrant removing an administrative judge, Ratcliffe said. "Sometimes there are tough calls but there is no evidence of bias or incompetence I see here."

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