

# Smoke impacts on wine unequal, experts say

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Smoke isn't an equal opportunity offender for wine grapes, with flavor impacts depending on the varietal as well as the fire's proximity, experts say.

Reverse osmosis filtration and other processes can mitigate the smoke's effects, though they come with their own costs for the finished wine, according to speakers at the Oregon Wine Symposium in Portland on March 8.

"We took a wine that would not be usable and made it usable," said winemaker Brian Gruber. "The biggest drawback is we made a wine that would not stand on its own."

Gruber worked at a custom crush wine facility in 2020, when more than 1 million acres of Oregon forestland were consumed by fire and smoke blanketed the

state's Willamette Valley.

The consequences of smoke exposure were immediately noticeable in the grapes, Gruber said. "This tasted like cherry barbecue sauce in the bin, before we even started fermenting."

Pinot noir, Cabernet franc and Grenache appear to suffer from the most noticeable effects of smoke taint, though it can affect any varietal, he said.

Smoke that recently originated from a nearby fire is more damaging than older smoke from a more distant blaze, he said.

It's also more likely to harm flavors in grapes that are nearing harvest than those that are immature, he said.

Through the reverse osmosis process, Gruber separated the water and alcohol from the other elements that impart flavor, texture and aroma to wine.

That water and alcohol were

then run through a carbon filter to reduce the effects of smoke taint, he said.

"It's a gentle way of splitting your wine and just treating the part that's a problem," he said. "You're breaking it apart, so you're trying not to touch the good stuff."

During the process, some of the tannins and other positive elements are lost, resulting in a less robust wine that tasted "thinner," Gruber said.

However, the when blended at a rate of 5% with wine that wasn't harmed by smoke, the treated wine was successfully salvaged, he said.

"Wildfires aren't going away, so it's just how we're going to deal with them in the future," said Brandon Moss, a winemaker in the Walla Walla region of Washington.

Moss said he encountered grapes in 2020 that didn't come

into contact with smoke as dense as that in Oregon.

The impacts from smoke taint didn't become apparent until near the end of fermentation, he said. "It was pretty promising at first and went downhill quickly from there."

That wine was also filtered with reverse osmosis, resulting in an "innocuous" red wine that had lost some of its character, Moss said.

"Some people are more sensitive than others and I err on the side of making the wine clean," though as a "blender," the treated wine "100% works," he said.

While all smoke contains compounds that are harmful to wine, the fumes from "cars and buildings" are particularly "gross," said Elizabeth Tomasino, associate professor and sensory analyst who studies wine at Oregon State University.

Isolating which types of smoke are especially damaging is under study at OSU, she said. "We're looking to track which compounds are really the problem."

The university is also examining films that can be sprayed on grapes to resist smoke taint, which imparts the taste of an ash tray, she said.

A method of testing for smoke taint that doesn't require fermentation would benefit the wine industry, Tomasino said. To that end, OSU is searching for "markers" that would indicate grapes are impacted.

The university is renovating a laboratory to specialize in smoke analysis and expects to learn a lot more about smoke taint in the next two to three years, Tomasino said.

"All this goes into risk management," she said.

# OSU Extension offers new course on agritourism

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN  
Capital Press

The Oregon State University Extension Service is starting a new online training course this year for farmers statewide interested in starting or expanding agritourism ventures.

The purpose of the course is twofold. First, it is to help producers explore new opportunities for generating income. Second, it is to help them avoid common pitfalls of agritourism.

"As a participant, you will learn about the types of agricultural tourism and determine if it is a good fit for your whole farm business," said Melissa Fery, associate professor of practice with the Small Farms Program and one of the program's instructors.

Agritourism is on the rise in Oregon. Many farmers say it is an opportunity to make additional income, boost a farm's popularity and expose urbanites to farm life.

However, agritourism also carries risks and costs. According to Jim Johnson, land use and water planning coordinator at the state Department of Agriculture, com-



Audrey Comerford



Melissa Fery



Courtesy of Audrey Comerford

An agritourism farm stand by County Line Flowers in Harrisburg, Ore.

mon challenges in agritourism include land use violations, permitting problems, unhappy neighbors and liability issues sometimes escalating to litigation.

The new training course was designed in part to help farmers navigate or avoid these issues.

The course was funded by a grant from USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture managed by the Western Center for Risk Management Education.

The curriculum was created by OSU Extension instructors Audrey Comerford, agritourism coordinator, and Fery, of the Small Farms Program.

"We felt agritourism is an opportunity for farmers, but there's also a lot that goes into decision-making, including laws and regulations," said Fery. "We wanted farmers and ranchers that are considering some kind of agritourism to be able to do so on a correct pathway."

The online course, Fery said, will be self-paced so that farmers can complete it at their convenience.

The curriculum includes text, videos and worksheets about managing risk, understanding legal requirements, marketing farm businesses effectively, hospitality and customer service. Farmers will also have the opportunity to consult with course instructors.

Fery said OSU plans to offer

the course long-term and eventually hopes to make it available year-round, but for the first year, the course is only open to new participants this spring. The deadline to register for the 2022 course is March 31.

The cost is \$20, which pays for maintenance of the website learning platform. Scholarships are available upon request.

Fery said she's excited about the opportunity for farms to expand or begin successful agritourism enterprises. There are many possibilities, she said, ranging from a crop farm selling value-added products to a sheep rancher teaching an on-farm fiber arts class.

"There's a lot of diversity within agricultural tourism," she said. "It's not just pumpkin patches and corn mazes. There are other subtle ways that you can have the public on your farm that might lead to something that could be beneficial — like offering classes related to farm products that you grow or raise. It doesn't have to be these great big events. There are also smaller ways to do agritourism that can be effective."

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