

**The National Grape and Wine Initiative Update**  
**Vineyard View**  
**by Cliff Ohmart**  
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In my July 2005 *Wines & Vines* column I reported on the formation of a nonprofit organization, the National Grape and Wine Initiative (NGWI), which has the potential to significantly improve support for research, extension, and outreach in all sectors of the grape and wine industry in the US (*Wines & Vines* 86(7):59-??). Our industry is at a critical time in terms of funding for research and extension so I thought it was time to update readers on the progress that has been made by NGWI.

*A Brief History of NGWI*

No where near enough money is invested in research and extension for grapes and grape products relative to their value to the US economy. It becomes particularly clear when you compare it to Australia's wine industry which has made great strides in the last 10 years and where more than \$20 million dollars is raised and spent annually on a wine industry about the size of California's. This topic has been addressed by myself and others in *Wines & Vines* over the last few years (e.g. Ohmart *Wines & Vines* 85(3):59-60; Ulrich *Wines & Vines* 88(12) 26-28, 32-36:). Coupled with this is a disturbing phenomenon that Dlott and Tucker commented on in recent editorial in *Capital Press* (California Farm Dec. 2007 pg 14). It seems that science is "taking a back seat to popular and private information sources in many discussions about agriculture, food systems and food choices". In other words, not only is not enough good science being done on important grape and wine industry issues but the appreciation for the importance of science seems to be declining and non-science media is taking its place as the reliable sources of information.

In 2003 a group of people from various parts of the grape and wine industry got together to discuss the need for more financial support and to develop a program to greatly increase it. NGWI was the result. Through facilitated meetings of stakeholders from all parts of the grape and wine industry a vision and mission were established. NGWI's vision is to enable the US grape and wine industry to be the world leader in consumer value and sustainability and contribute to the quality of life in rural communities. The goal was to triple the industry's economic impact by the year 2020. NGWI's mission is to achieve the vision by assuring outcome-based funding to deliver innovative, prioritized and collaborative research, technology development, extension and education for the grape and wine industry ([www.ngwi.org](http://www.ngwi.org)).

A 27-member Board of Directors, representing all products of the grape industry, including table, wine, and juice grapes, and from all parts of the US, are tasked with achieving the NGWI vision and mission. Ten states are represented on the Board and two members are from Washington, DC. Moreover, a broad range of expertise is represented, including research, extension, marketing, growers, winemakers, statewide grower and winemaker organizations, and policy experts.

## *Progress to Date*

NGWI's first order of business was to create an integrated plan to improve grape and wine production in the US through research, extension and outreach. This was done by the convening of a series of workshops where researchers and outreach/extension experts in the grape and wine industry from around the US were invited to participate. They identified 4 key areas of focus: 1) Understanding and improving quality of grapes and grape products, 2) Consumers, nutrition and community, 3) Process and production efficiency, and 4) Sustainable practices in the vineyard and processing facilities. Committees were formed for each area and through conference calls and face to face meetings a comprehensive list of important research and extension issues was established for each one. Objectives, strategies, milestones, timelines and budgets were then created for each issue and people were identified to be responsible for accomplishing the objectives. The issues were put in priority order since everyone knew there were limited resources to work on them. And finally, short, mid and long-term timelines were established for each one and a strategy was put in place for the top two or three issues in each program area so work on them could begin immediately.

Extension of research results to the users is critical for an industry to be successful and sustainable but it is often overlooked. The NGWI Board has made a point to include extension and outreach in all the objectives of each committee. Furthermore, an extension and outreach committee was established to develop effective communication between researchers and extension personnel as well as to improve communication among the extension programs around the US.

It is important that funding of research on grapes and grape products is coordinated, particularly if the amount of money currently available is not great. Therefore NGWI also took on the task of communicating with all of the organizations who fund research on grapes and grape products, as well as institutions that carry out 'in-house' research, such as the USDA Agriculture Research Service (ARS). Through face-to-face meetings, conference calls, and emails, NGWI was able to get great cooperation among funders, such as the American Vineyard Foundation, Viticulture Consortium East, Viticulture Consortium West, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Pierce's Disease Control Program, and the University of California Pierce's Disease Research Program to coordinate Requests for Proposals so that the NGWI research priorities were considered during the grant review process for each of the groups.

## *Why is NGWI Important?*

Simply put, no industry has been successful and sustainable without significant investment in research, development, and marketing. In 2007 the sale of winegrapes, table grapes, grape juice and juice products, wine, and raisins amounted to \$21.3 billion<sup>1</sup>. I estimate that roughly \$5 million is available each year for research on grapes and grape products from public and private funding organizations, not counting ARS programs and

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<sup>1</sup> The impact of wine, grapes and grape products on the American economy 2007: Family businesses building value. MKF Research LLC, St. Helena, CA. 32pp.

the CDFA wine industry-funded PD research program. That is a research investment of 0.02% of the value of product sales. Throw in the CDFA PD research program and the investment jumps to a whopping 0.04%. This is just not good enough if we expect to compete in the global marketplace.

There are many reasons why we need to figure out how to significantly increase the amount of money for research and extension and I only have space to discuss one that I think is particularly important. If we do not, we are going to lose the infrastructure in our research and extension institutions that is devoted to the grape and wine industry. Grants of \$50,000, which is a common amount for many of the grape and wine funding organizations, are too small to be useful to researchers who must 'publish or perish'. Their cost of doing business, just like for growers and winemakers, has increased tremendously. Therefore they must seek out grants that bring in several hundred thousand dollars at one go. Institutions such as the National Research Institute, National Institute of Health, and the National Science Foundation offer such grants. The end result is that fewer researchers are able to work on grape-related projects and fewer students are attracted to do advanced degrees in viticulture and enology. It is these students that become our future research scientists. Moreover, since universities get a significant income from charging overhead on grants, they are reluctant to hire new faculty in research areas where there is not much grant money available.

I realize that several state Universities have recently created new positions in viticulture and enology, which is exciting. However, the pot of grant money available to these researchers has not grown so there are now more people applying the same small amount of money.

The CDFA PD research program is a great example of what can happen when a large amount of money is raised to support a specific area of research. Grants can be over \$100,000 a year for up to 3 years and as a result some very talented researchers have applied, been awarded grants, and have done really great work. Moreover, it has attracted scientists that had not worked on grapes before but could apply their many skills to the problem at hand. Researchers quickly figured out how to prevent the spread of Glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS) to new areas of the state, economically control it over large areas, and have made great strides in figuring out the ecology of *Xylella fastidiosa* and how it causes PD in grape vines. This rapid progress never would have happened without the CDFA PD research fund. I realize that a long-term management program for PD has not been established yet but it is important to know that it is not for the lack of good science. It is because bacteria-caused diseases like PD that affect the xylem of the plant are probably the most challenging to figure out how to control.

NGWI has made great progress in a short time prioritizing research, outreach and extension and coordination among the current funders of research for the grape and wine industry. The next big challenge is to figure out how to significantly increase the amount of money available for research, extension and outreach. The key will be effective public-private partnerships. If you are interested in finding out more about NGWI visit

[www.ngwi.org](http://www.ngwi.org). Look up the Board membership and contact a Board member near you to find out how you can help.