

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

Laurie Enos

(916) 446-3901 or lenos@ngwi.org



**NATIONAL
GRAPE &
WINE
INITIATIVE**

**National Grape & Wine Initiative Announces \$6 Million Federal
Research Grant to Transform U.S. Vineyard Management**

*Groundbreaking Technology Expected to Help Farmers Accurately
Predict Crop Yield, Precisely Manage Resources*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (October 7, 2015) – The National Grape & Wine Initiative (NGWI) announced today it helped secure \$6 million over four years in federal funding for research to develop and apply new technologies to transform the way grapes are grown throughout the United States.

Funding comes from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), which just released the first continuation grant installment of \$2,357,674.

Led by award-winning scientists Drs. Terry Bates of Cornell University and Stephen Nuske of Carnegie Mellon University, the research project will focus on using technology to create digital maps that will allow farmers to zero in on the conditions within their vineyards and significantly enhance their ability to predict crop size, according to Jean-Mari Peltier, president of NGWI.

“This project will build on the work of an industry funded pilot project that demonstrated tremendous promise in developing tools for precision vineyard management,” Peltier said. “We believe it will lead to the commercialization of hardware and software that will benefit growers of wine, juice, raisin and table grapes, nationwide.”

Employing both novel and off-the-shelf sensor technologies, the industry pilot project has resulted in the ability to create digital management maps of soil, canopy and the crop. Of particular note is the new prototype crop estimation tool, which can be

attached to common vineyard equipment and takes thousands of images per minute, providing a far more accurate view of grape clusters.

“It is impossible to overstate the value this technology will provide in improving grape farmers’ ability to apply the right management practices at the right time and right place in their vineyards,” said Peltier. “Our goal is to increase vineyard production by 20 percent and decrease vineyard variability by 30 percent.”

The combined data holds the promise of providing a wealth of information to farmers, including data about crop yield, soil conditions, irrigation and fertilization needs; canopy growth and the color and maturity of grapes. Additionally, digital mapping can help farmers balance quality and quantity of their crops; manage and direct harvesting operations; and help them pinpoint the varying soil conditions and needs throughout their vineyards.

“This project exemplifies what the specialty crop industry has been looking for from SCRI,” said John Aguirre, President of the California Association of Winegrape Growers, and Chairman of the NGWI Board. “Because of grower involvement from day one, it reflects an industry-driven research agenda to ensure the outcome will be relevant and valuable to the nation’s grape growers and ultimately American consumers.”

NGWI members, he said, worked with government officials to create a new two-step review process for SCRI: an industry relevancy review followed by a scientific peer review. This new approach helps ensure that projects funded are of value to industry and are scientifically sound.

“We greatly appreciate the fact that this grant was developed as a partnership between growers and scientists and that through the new SCRI review process, it was evaluated by both groups,” Aguirre said. “We believe it has the potential to serve as a model for other competitive grants administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).”

In addition to Cornell and Carnegie Mellon, the project will also receive support and involvement of experts from the University of California at Davis and Newcastle University in England.

#

ABOUT THE NATIONAL GRAPE & WINE INITIATIVE

The National Grape and Wine Initiative (NGWI) is an industry-driven partnership with academic and government representatives, designed to focus emphasis on research and extension as a means to strengthen the competitiveness of America’s grape and grape product industries. Grapes are the nation’s leading specialty crop and all industry segments including raisin, juice, fresh grape and wine created the NGWI coalition to drive research for maximum productivity, sustainability and competitiveness. NGWI aims to lead the world in consumer value and quality.