

To: U.S. Grape and Wine Industry Stakeholders
From: National Grape Research Alliance

Dear Colleagues:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) is charged with advancing grape genetics research in the U.S. Through its laboratory facilities in Geneva, NY, and grape variety collections in Geneva and Davis, CA, ARS seeks to deliver world-class science. Yet, despite the grape industries' economic contribution of \$220 billion annually and the tremendous promise of genetics to improve the quality and competitiveness of grapes for fresh consumption, wine and juice production, and raisins, **the USDA's funding for grape genetics research remains woefully inadequate.**

Through attrition and budget cuts, the main, dedicated Grape Genetics Research Unit in Geneva is staffed by three Ph.D.-level scientists—down from five in 2012, and a farther fall from the original vision in 2004, which called for eight. The unit's budget also has declined significantly over the past decade, with a mere \$1.5 million today allocated for salaries, facilities and infrastructure, supplies and equipment. The unit's facilities are cramped and ill-suited for modern genetics research, and it has no funding to implement modern technologies for genetic improvement. Clearly, under the current level of funding, **this strategic unit cannot achieve the kind of advances in genetics research the American grape industries need.**

The National Grape Research Alliance seeks **a Congressional appropriation of an additional \$10 million per year in funding for grape genetics research.** Here's what could be achieved:

- Grapes are vulnerable to an increasing number of threats—invasive insects and diseases, extremes of drought, heat and cold, and increasing levels of salt in our soils and water—all with potentially devastating economic consequences. Only with a greater understanding of the **tolerance of grape varieties** to these threats can we be ready to combat the next deadly virus or severe change in climate in our grape-growing regions.
- The U.S. is home to a vast reservoir of native grape germplasm, including species of wine, table and juice grapes, and raisin varieties with resistance to many of the most devastating pests and diseases, and environmental challenges facing the industry. But due to insufficient funding, the DNA of the majority of these vines has not been analyzed. Doing so would reveal the **sources of genetic resistance to pests, diseases and other stresses** that threaten U.S. grape production, enabling us to breed new cultivars faster and with greater success, greatly reducing the need for chemicals in our vineyards and ultimately relegating these threats to the past. Even the tradition-bound European wine industries have begun to embrace modern genetic methods and disease-resistant varieties. Will the U.S. be left behind?

With a \$10 million annual increase in funding, the ARS programs responsible for grape genetics research could be adequately staffed, properly equipped and housed in facilities conducive to scientific exploration befitting a leader in grape growing and production. But we need your help.

Please [download and use our appropriations request](#) to reach out to your Congressmen and -women, especially those on the House and Senate Ag Appropriations Committees, listed herein. Help them understand that:

- **Grapes are the largest and most economically important fruit and specialty crop in the U.S.,** representing approximately 1 million acres and more than \$6 billion in farm-gate revenue, and a staggering \$219.9 billion in total national impact.
- Grapes are commercially produced in 49 of the 50 states, and **vineyards represent a critical component of America's rural economy**—a hot button for the current USDA administration.

Investment in grape genetics research is essential to maintain the long-term viability and competitive advantage of the U.S. grape industry. Please join this collective effort and help make grapevine improvement part of our national DNA. Thank you for your support!

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THE IMPACT OF GRAPE GENETICS RESEARCH TODAY

Think the USDA's grape genetics resources serve only California (the nation's largest grape-growing state) or New York (third largest, and home of the USDA-ARS Grape Genetics Resource Unit)? Think again.

Government grape geneticists have guided public grape breeding and genetics programs in 13 states: North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, New York, Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and California. And they've worked directly with small private breeders in nearly all states. Their expertise has helped in using modern genetic tools to develop locally adapted, disease resistant varieties with improved fruit quality. For example:

- Powdery mildew causes losses to yield and quality everywhere grapes are grown, particularly on the West Coast, where it is the primary disease that grape growers manage. The disease-resistant varieties that GGRU scientists are helping to develop will have an estimated economic impact exceeding \$1 billion in the U.S., and will reduce pesticide use in grapes by more than 90% in California, Oregon, Idaho and Washington.
- Muscadine grapes are a popular local specialty in the southeastern U.S., and GGRU scientists have collaborated with breeders, geneticists, chemists, and pathologists in North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas and Oklahoma to develop new disease resistant, seedless varieties with improved fruit quality and thinner skins.
- Cold winters and spring frosts present challenges to much of the northern U.S., and the cold physiology tools, knowledge and genetic resources from GGRU have contributed to improved production and cold hardiness breeding in most U.S. states. In particular, breeding programs in Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and New York have directly benefited from GGRU research.

From Texas to North Dakota, Kentucky to Michigan, Virginia to New Jersey, emerging wine regions have looked to the USDA grape genetics resources for guidance in rootstock and scion variety selection, disease management, and production practices. Help us expand and enrich the reach of these grape genetics resources for even greater impact nationwide!

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