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Contact: Linda McCandless, llm3@cornell.edu, 607-254-5137

Wine and grape program at Cornell's Hudson Valley Laboratory receives \$85K in NYS budget

By Aaron Goldweber

GENEVA, N.Y. - In the recently passed New York State budget, the legislature provided \$85,000 for Cornell University's Hudson Valley Laboratory (HVL) in Highland, NY, to enhance wine and grape research and extension programs.

Researchers and extension educators working out of the HVL will seek to boost economic opportunities for the Hudson Valley's wine and grape industries by working with local industry to identify grape cultivars that are best suited for the area's soils and climatic conditions, and control diseases and insects that attack grapes.

"Through the vision and initiative of Senator Bill Larkin, it is extremely gratifying that there is now funding designated for viticulture research at the Hudson Valley Laboratory," said Thomas J. Burr, associate dean in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and director of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES). "The lab has a long history of accomplishment in tree fruit and vegetable research. For the first time, the lab will have responsibility for viticulture research as well. I thank the fruit industry leadership in the Hudson Valley for supporting this initiative that will stimulate growth and prosperity of the wine industry in the valley."

"Cornell will cooperate closely with industry leaders in the Hudson Valley to further refine research and extension objectives so as to meet industry needs as quickly as possible," says David A. Rosenberger, a plant pathologist who is superintendent of the HVL.

"An initial objective is to provide the industry with assistance in identifying suitable grape-growing sites because low temperatures can damage some of the best wine grape varieties during winter," explains Rosenberger. "To evaluate sites, we will be installing temperature-recording instruments throughout the valley, including on cooperating growers' land, and combining that data with meteorological models, soil maps, and historical data to get a good picture of the best locations for expanded grape production."

Cornell researchers from NYSAES and extension specialists from other parts of the Hudson Valley have been working to improve production practices, promote innovation, and solve problems for vintners and grape growers all along the Hudson River, from Poughkeepsie to the Champlain Valley. Recent activities have included:

- Professor Thomas Henick-Kling, who leads Cornell's enology research program, and Dragana Dimitrijevic, extension associate, have held one-on-one consultations with 15 Hudson Valley wineries on how to improve wine quality.
- Extension associate Kevin Iungerman coordinates joint programs with the universities of Minnesota and Vermont designed to help growers establish cold-hardy grape cultivars in the upper Hudson Valley. Iungerman has also established a grape field trial site at Cornell's Willsboro Research Farm.
- Workshops on the selection of climate and soil appropriate grape cultivars for the Hudson Valley, coordinated by Fruit Extension Educator Steve McKay have been held at various locations over the past several years.

The current economic impact of New York State wine, grapes, and grape juice has been estimated at \$3.3 billion. According to the New York Wine and Grape Foundation, there are 38 wine producers in the Hudson Valley, including Brotherhood Winery, the nation's oldest continuously operating winery.
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New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, 630 West North Street, Geneva, New York 14456
Telephone: 315.787.2011



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