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 Contact: Linda McCandless, llm3@cornell.edu

Research Leader Joins USDA-ARS Grape Genetics Research Unit

by Joe Ogrodnick

Geneva, N.Y.: Dr. Gan-Yuan Zhong recently joined the Grape Genetics Research Unit (GGRU) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [Agricultural Research Service](#) (USDA-ARS) in Geneva, N.Y., as research leader and supervisory plant geneticist. He was formerly a senior research scientist at Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., in Johnston, Iowa.

Zhong's research interests are molecular breeding and functional genomics of grapes in relation to tolerance to diseases, pests, and abiotic stress. At Pioneer, he worked on the development and implementation of molecular markers and other molecular breeding technologies, and the genetic dissection of complex traits such as high kernel oil and starch content in maize.

Earlier work at Pioneer included transgenic trait development of insect and herbicide tolerance in maize, transgene genetics with a particular focus on gene silencing and transgenic position effect, and the development of industrial products in transgenic maize.

USDA-ARS is breaking new ground in grape research in New York's Finger Lakes region, whose storied history with viticulture and the wine industry dates back to the 1850s. Scientists with the ARS Grape Genetics Research Unit, which was established in October 2005, study the full gamut of grapes grown in the United States, including those grown in California's semiarid valleys and in the cold-winter climates of the Northeast.

GGRU works closely with their sister organization the USDA-ARS Plant Genetic Resources Unit (PGRU), also housed at Geneva. An integral part of the National Plant Germplasm System, the PGRU preserves and safeguards about 20,000 samples of cold-hardy grapes, apples, tart cherries and vegetables, and has more than 1,200 accessions of Vitis - about one-third of ARS's total grape collection - planted in its vineyards.

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Dr. Gan-Yuan Zhong
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