The accompanying table is our annual compilation of grape prices from processors and wineries that buy fruit in the Finger Lakes. We are able to compile this list for two reasons. The first reason is the NY grape pricing law – which requires those who purchase grapes (above a certain threshold) state their prices by August 15. The second reason we are able to compile this list is that 27 area wineries and processors were willing to send their price letter to my office. Our thanks to all of the processors who send their prices to our office.

Look for a breakdown on price trends in the upcoming Vineyard Notes Harvest Issue in late October. Until then, best wishes for a successful harvesting season.

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Fruit sampling after veraison is used to monitor the progress of the crop. Typically, blocks are sampled every second to third week, more intensively as harvest approaches. The most common tests are pH, titratable acidity and Brix.

There is some debate on the best technique for fruit sampling. In his classical work "Knowing and Making Wine", enologist Emile Peynaud recommends taking 250 berries per block. Only one berry per plant must be sampled, varying the side of the cluster exposure and side of the row, so that the sample is as close to random as possible. It is also recommended that the same person do the sampling each time. This will help eliminate differences due to sampling technique.

Others feel that berry samples can be very inaccurate, as the sampler often unconsciously chooses the plumpest or the reddest or the softest berry. They choose to sample entire clusters rather than just berries. This method is controversial, since, in order to get an accurate read, a fairly large quantity of fruit will be removed from the vineyard with each sample.

An article in the French trade magazine La Vigne addressed a new method proposed by INRA of Bordeaux (a governmental research organization). They emphasize that the vines selected for sampling must present the average for the block, that is, they must be neither too vigorous, nor too weak. The vines must have an average pruning weight.
INRA has found that there can be variable ripening within a cane or cordon (e.g. one side of a vine). For example, often clusters closer to the head of the vine or at the ends of the canes are precocious in their maturity. They therefore recommend that only clusters found in the middle 2/3 of a cane or cordon be sampled. They found that fruit in this area more nearly approximates the average for a given block.

The shoot selected should be of average diameter for the block. While research results have been most consistent when the basal clusters are sample, it can be too time consuming to always locate the basal cluster. The basal cluster or the second cluster from the base are therefore seen as suitable for sampling.

There also can be variable ripening within a given cluster. Generally, the lower part of a cluster is slightly behind the upper part. It is therefore advised to alternately sample the upper and lower parts of a cluster. It would also make sense to sample both exposed and non-exposed sides of a cluster.

Samples of 200 berries in groups of 3-5 berries per plant are recommended. This would be equivalent to between 40 and 65 vines per block for 9x8 spacing. For local vineyards with small blocks (<2-3 acres), sample at least 20 vines/block, so that 100-150 berries are collected. If one area of a block grows differently than another, sample each separately. Three to five berries per cluster is desirable, because, according to INRA, sampler bias is minimized this way. They point out that sampling small groups of berries will better represent the morphological diversity of berries that exists in a vineyard. The 3-5 berries should be contiguous, or adjacent to one another. In a loose cluster, a small arm of the rachis (cluster stem) can be snipped off. In a more compact cluster, the berries will have to be individually selected, but they should still be adjacent to one another.

Happy sampling. And don’t forget to taste the fruit! Across the world, many vineyard managers and winemakers also base their harvest decisions on the taste, texture and appearance of the fruit. (AW)

References

UPCOMING EVENTS

**February 20-22, 2002.** Buffalo Convention Center. **Viticulture 2003.** This meeting will be held in place of the Finger Lakes Grape Growers Convention. Look for 2 ½ days of program focused on viticulture, markets, vineyard profitability, business management, and the future of the grape industry in NY and the northeast. Meeting will feature national and internationally known speakers, and a huge trade show. Save the date, and look for further details in upcoming *Vineyard Notes!*