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Wine grape preharvest monitoring service back for 2011 season

With harvest season around the corner, a popular preharvest monitoring service for Niagara grape growers is once again going online to tell the story of this year's crop.

Building on the success of last year's program, Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) together with the Grape Growers of Ontario are once again busy tracking the progress of this season's wine grape ripening.

Over the coming weeks, CCOVI viticulturist Jim Willwerth will co-ordinate ongoing grape sampling and analysis at four locations in Niagara. He will track key indicators of fruit ripeness to help assess the variation in ripening across the region.

Researchers at CCOVI understand the importance of up-to-date information on grape development across different sectors of Niagara to meet the needs of grape growers and winemakers. Grapes mature uniquely depending on the year, variety and terroir. As a result, preharvest monitoring data is crucial for the industry to determine the best times to harvest in terms of grape and wine quality.

Willwerth will sample four of the region's most common vinifera wine grape varieties (Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon) at four separate vineyards – two on each side of the Welland Canal.

Linda Tremblay, lead technologist in the analytical lab at CCOVI, will test samples for sugar, pH, titrable acidity and volatile acidity. CCOVI technician Lynda vanZuiden will also assist in the lab to help handle the additional processing volume for this year's program.

Monitoring results will be reported weekly on CCOVI's website: www.brocku.ca/ccovi

They will also be available on OMAFRA's website:
<http://apps.omafra.gov.on.ca/scripts/english/crops/agriphone/article.asp?ID=1891>

Program data will also feed into a database CCOVI is developing for year-to-year comparisons in support of research it is conducting on the impact of climate change on Ontario's grape and wine industry.

“This service allows for important preharvest data to be shared among grape growers and winemakers in Niagara,” says Debbie Inglis, director, CCOVI. “This is a shining example of how our Institute is working together with growers and wineries to meet their needs.”

Willwerth was hired last summer to help CCOVI support grape growers and winemakers with applied research and outreach focused on priorities identified by the industry. The CCOVI Analytical Services lab opened its doors in March 2010.

This initiative was part of a project supported by a \$1.4 million investment under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Developing Innovative Agri-Products program, which supports industry-led research and innovation and is part of CCOVI’s heightened emphasis on outreach to the grape and wine industry.

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