

7 September 2017
R00155
Brock University – Communications & Public Affairs

**NOTE - Attached to this release is a photo that is free for media use. Caption: CCOVI viticulturist Jim Willwerth was busy collecting the first round of grape samples at vineyards throughout the Niagara region Monday as the institute's preharvest monitoring program got underway. He and CCOVI oenologist Belinda Kemp will be collecting samples every Monday from now until harvest to be processed by CCOVI's Analytical Services department.*

Brock scientists helping growers closely track ripening grapes

As harvest season quickly approaches, Niagara's grape growers and winemakers are keeping a steady eye on the grapes ripening in their vineyards. They can now also turn to scientists at Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) to help them make informed harvest decisions.

Every week from now until harvest, CCOVI's annual preharvest monitoring program will track key indicators of ripeness at four different vineyard sites in the Niagara Peninsula. At those sites, CCOVI viticulturist Jim Willwerth and CCOVI oenologist Belinda Kemp will be sampling grape clusters from five core Ontario varieties: Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon.

After the samples are selected, key ripeness indicators such as brix (sugar levels), titratable acidity, pH levels and volatile acidity (a measure of fruit integrity) are then measured by [CCOVI's Analytical Services department](#).

Willwerth said while this season was not as hot or dry as previous years, "we are on track for some of the similar vintages of 2013 and 2014 – which provided some fantastic cool-climate wines with great character and regional identity.

"Although it's been a challenging year with the wetter weather, the size and health of the crop looks very good – a testament to how our growers have been managing this weather and the delayed maturation."

Willwerth says the preharvest monitoring program, which has been running since 2010, provides data that is "an integral part of the industry's decision-making process."

The collected data is available to the industry [through an interactive website](#), providing users with insight into how different grape varieties are responding to the current growing season. It also provides the ability to compare harvests from different areas in the region from year-to-year.

Interest in the program goes well beyond Canada. Last year alone, more than 1,900 users in 17 countries went online to follow CCOVI's monitoring of the Niagara harvest. Beamsville grape grower Ed Hughes said comparing different harvests helps him track the progress of his own crop and make predictions about what's ahead.

"Is my crop as it should be? Am I ahead or behind?" the 2011 Grape King explained. "I can also look back at similar years' harvests to help me make assumptions on this year's possibilities, and also look at possible areas of improvement for the next year."

Richie Roberts, winemaker at Fielding Estate Winery in Lincoln, calls the program a "time-saving tool, when time is more valuable than ever." With a later harvest date expected this year, he said the CCOVI program "will be even more useful to help monitor progress in different parts of Niagara."

Sampling for the preharvest monitoring program will take place every week and the data will be posted online at ccovi.ca/preharvest every Tuesday until harvest.

For more information or for assistance arranging interviews:

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Brock University Marketing and Communications has a full-service studio where we can provide high definition video and broadcast-quality audio.