BROCK UNIVERSITY MEDIA RELEASE

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CCOVI's VineAlert prepares Ontario grape growers

As we bundle up to keep warm amidst plummeting temperatures, grapevines are also feeling the chill, and require other methods to beat the cold. Thankfully, many area grape growers were aware of the pending risks to their vines due to a system called VineAlert. As a result, many of them were able to mitigate the impact by warming the air through the use of wind machines and helicopters.

It is evident by today's events that preparedness is paramount. The decision of Agriculture and Agrifood Canada (AAFC), the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation (MEDI) and Ontario Grape and Wine Research Inc to fund the bud hardiness monitoring and the VineAlert project was key to avoiding vine damage this morning, as it has put grape growers in a desirable position to be proactive and react quickly to changing temperatures. Many growers and wineries across all subappellations within the Niagara Peninsula ran their wind machines this morning between 6 am and 8 am when temperatures started to drop below -3°C.

CCOVI Viticulturist at Brock University, Jim Willwerth says the warm March weather has led to significant cold deacclimation of grapevines almost a month ahead of schedule. "Through VineAlert we can relay to grape growers how cold hardy different cultivars are based on location so that they know the risks and at what temperature cold injury may result to the vines" Willwerth said, "Through this timely information they know when protection strategies such as wind machines and helicopters need to be used to save the vines from damage.

Willwerth is also giving a talk tomorrow, Wednesday, March 28, as part of the CCOVI Lecture Series called "Beating the cold: Best viticulture practices to maximize vine hardiness". The lecture is available to attend in-person or online via live webcast at www.brocku.ca/ccovi. He will be discussing current cold hardiness research projects at CCOVI and providing more insight into how the erratic weather of late is impacting the vine's cold tolerance.

Area grape growers, including Curtis Fielding of Fielding Estate Winery, are grateful for the services that VineAlert offers. "Vine alert is a very beneficial tool that I use very regularly, it has taken all the guess work out of when we should be running our wind machines" Fielding stated, "I use the site specific bud hardiness numbers to help in my decision making; this research is great for the industry and our vines are healthier as a result".

CCOVI Director, Dr. Debbie Inglis spoke with CHCH News this morning about the weather and the impact it is having on grapevines. Please visit www.chch.com and click on "Sleepless night for fruit growers" for the full story.

For more information on VineAlert and to sign up for the service, please visit www.ccovi.ca/vine-alert.

This initiative is supported by funding through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) Developing Innovative Agri-Products initiative and the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation's (MEDI) Ontario Research Fund, which supports industry-led research and innovation. This outreach project is a collaboration between AAFC, MEDI, the Grape Growers of Ontario and Brock's CCOVI and is part of CCOVI's heightened emphasis on outreach to the grape and wine industry.



Helicopter over vineyard in Niagara on the Lake warming the air to prevent frost damage to grapevines

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