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SECTION B

### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES

### Tobacco grower turns over leaf for grapevines

### KAREN DAVIDSON

Burning Kiln Winery has fired the imaginations of not only tobacco growers but an entire region that's branding itself the South Coast as an agri-tourism destination. Its remarkable story has also won the nod for the Agriculture Minister's 2012 Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence, an accolade worth \$50,000.

Situated on a picturesque road overlooking Lake Erie at St. Williams, Ontario, the winery is just six years old. It was born out of a belief that the soils of a tobacco farm could be converted to a vineyard. But it takes more than soil for finicky grapes. Brock University's temperature analysis showed that grapes could thrive. With hard data in hand, Mike McArthur, a local lawyer, and five other investors approached tobacco farmer Frank DeLeebeeck on his interest in becoming a vineyard manager.

"I thought these guys were nuts," recalls DeLeebeeck, who was a tobacco grower with 28 seasons under his belt. But tobacco was downsizing and with farm mortgages still outstanding, DeLeebeeck agreed to hedge his tobacco bets by renting eight acres for grapes. In relenting to become vineyard manager as well, he was propelled into a new world.

"This was a whole new

Burning Kiln vineyard manager Frank DeLeebeeck examines Cabernet Franc grapes before the crop is hand-picked. The St. Williams, Ontario winery has won the 2012 Minister's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence for its success in converting from tobacco to grapes, and in adapting kilns for drying grapes, appassimento-style. Photos by Glenn Lowson.

learning curve that changed my attitudes," says DeLeebeeck. "I had to be open-minded and adapt because my old knowledge had no bearing on grapes."

The vineyard started with Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir,

With recent petiole analysis, specific parts of the field have been pinpointed for spot fertilizer. The sandy soil leaches more than Niagara-area clay soils, so different management is required.

freient management is required.

working properly," says DeLeebeeck. "I'm up all night monitoring temperatures."

Tobacco experience does come in handy with some summer and fall routines. Tobacco equipment can be modified to irrigate the vineyard, as was the case this past summer. And come fall, DeLeebeeck is expert at managing the kilns which are used to dry grapes, appassimento-style, in accordance with winemaker Andrzej Lipinski's brix levels. It's the adaptation of these bulk tobacco kilns that's at the heart of the innovation award. The fan system and resulting airflows are substantial, ensuring a natural drying process while minimizing spoilage that might occur in the humid southern Ontario climate.

process for quality purposes."

The Burning Kiln crew designed a track and cart system for each kiln so that stacked pallets containing the hand-picked grape clusters could be subjected to the most airflow. The design is such that a forklift can easily remove a stack of grapes. A lighting system operates in each kiln to aid inspection. Burning Kiln Winery now produces 7,000 cases per year, distributing mostly through the vineyard store and to a minor extent, the LCBO. The next step is to convince local restaurants to support the fledgling industry. With Mike McArthur as chair, the South Coast Wineries and Growers Association now includes 10 wineries and six to eight growers. With planting intentions for 2013, it's expected that 125 acres will be in vineyards. That's the magic number to qualify for a distinct appellation from Grape Growers of Ontario.

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### www.thegrower.org

Riesling and Chardonnay varietals, but soon expanded with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon on additional acres. Last year, Petit Verdo was planted as was Pinot Gris. Today, the vineyard comprises 26 acres.

The learning curve continues as DeLeebeeck manages different diseases and insects, different spraying regimes and labour requirements. He's become a student of pruning, learning from consultant Lloyd Smith. Because the vineyard is on virgin land, the soil is so nutrient rich that no fertilizers were added until recently. In fact, grape vines grow too vigorously and need to be double-caned to allow sunlight to the grapes.



Even with a micro-climate hugging the shores of Lake Erie, Burning Kiln requires wind machines to prevent frost. Never was that more important than last spring. While the blooms of nearby peach orchards perished, DeLeebeeck supervised wind machines to save the crop. "Never assume that they are

"Our experience is that there is no need for the actual furnace for the drying of grapes," says DeLeeBeeck. "We wanted to maintain a slow and natural

### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES



# Appassimento –styled wines may open new category for red varietals

#### KAREN DAVIDSON

Appassimento wine-making – the practice of outdoor grape drying to concentrate the fruit – is as old as the northern Italian hills. Canadian grape growers think the tradition, with tweaks, has a role in the New World. L'Acadie Vineyards in Nova Scotia and several wineries in Ontario are experimenting with regional red varietals.

In climates and geographies that may limit the maturity of

Merlot for example, the appassimento technique allows the grace of extra time to ripen off-vine to concentrate sugars and flavours. This drying method is particularly appealing in jurisdictions where fall harvest weather is unpredictable and there's a need

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to standardize consistency. Until now, no one has scientifically measured the differences in wines when the grapes are dried in kilns or greenhouses rather than barns. Or for that matter, no one has built an economic case for the drying technique in a temperature and humidity-controlled chamber.

To answer these questions, researchers at Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) have received funding for four years to study varieties such as Cabernet Franc dried to either 26 degrees brix or 28 degrees brix. The comparisons are between four drying methods: kiln-drying which can dry grapes in as little as three days; greenhouse drying which takes up to 14 days; barndrying with fans which can take weeks; or a temperature and humidity-controlled chamber that can be dialed in for slow drying. A control sample consists of grapes left on the vines to shrivel.

Some of this research involves fungal analysis and studying the microbial interactions on the grape skins. Michael Brownbridge, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (VRIC), is to offer data on how these microbial colonies assist or detract from the end result. And differed in their chemical profile and had distinctive sensory profiles. The sensory analysis from the 2011 vintage is underway now.

For those grapes boosted to 26 brix, the alcohol content generally settles at 14.5 per cent whereas those grapes dried to 28 brix, will result in wines at 16 per cent alcohol.

"At the end of all this, we'll be conducting an economic analysis of drying techniques," says Inglis. "Working with multi-partners, we'll also be liaising with VQA Ontario to see how the industry might define the regulations for a new category of appassimentostyled wines."

That would be an exciting market for all red wine makers, who want to expand the complexity of wines from cool climate regions. The opportunity is why Pillitteri Estates Winery, Cave Spring Cellars and Reif Estate Winery have been cooperators since day one.

### Marketing opportunities abound

"I have to credit a great winemaker, Andrzej Lipinski, for pioneering the first kiln-drying process and sharing his information with colleagues to make better quality VQA wines," says Jamie Slingerland, director of viniculture, Pillitteri Estates Winery. Slingerland has bought into the research in a big way. The 55 tonnes of grapes which were kiln-dried by his winery this year show so much promise that 100 tonnes are to be dried in 2013 for bottling in the future. "The method allows us to take a reserve wine to grand reserve status, and in some instances, to triple the price point from \$20 to \$60," he explains.

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when the wines are finally fermented, it's CCOVI's Gary Pickering who undertakes sensory analysis to help define this new Ontario style.

Preliminary data on the first two harvests indicate major differences in the time invested to dry grapes to the target end point. All grapes were picked at 23 brix. Kiln drying was the most rapid technique requiring only three days to reach 26 brix and five days to reach 28 brix, reports CCOVI director and project lead Debra Inglis. The longest drying treatment was on-vine requiring 30 days to reach 26 brix and 42 days to reach 28 brix. She indicates that the wines resulting from the various techniques

#### CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES



Debra Inglis, executive director, CCOVI at Brock University (L), reviews this year's drying status with cooperator Jamie Slingerland, director of viticulture, Pillitteri Estates Winery and Jim van der Zalm, European Planters, the site of the greenhouse drying trial. Photo by Kaitlyn Little.

#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The Canadian market might not have open wallets for these premium-priced wines, but the Asian market is already primed. Since half of Pillitteri's production is ice wine and 90 per cent of its exports are to Asia, Slingerland says it's a logical next step to introduce established customers to other premium wines, including appassimento styles. The economics make even more sense if a partial container of ice wine can be topped up with premium wines-all from one winery.

Enjoying strong brand recognition with Asians, Pillitteri Estates also receives a good share of Asian tourism business at their Niagara-on-the-Lake winery. When busloads arrive, tourists see the value in buying \$40 gift wine bottles for which they would otherwise pay marked-up prices at home.

"There's a great evolution happening among Ontario wineries," says Slingerland. "We're adapting to a changing environment."

As much as critics carp about deviating from time-honoured drying practices, the fact is that Italy's Masi Wines is climatethe VRIC trial.

"This method offers growers a huge risk-mitigation opportunity," says John Young, president, Angels Gate Winery. "We can harvest early before bad weather or pestilence affects the crop. We don't focus on just the brix level but other physiological changes that can soften the tannins."

For Angels Gate Winery, the opportunity is two-fold: boost a strong vintage to an amarone or ripassso-styled wine and to potentially back blend, using about 15 per cent of appassimento-dried grapes with table grapes in a year where quality needs to be enhanced.

**''** There's a great evolution happening among Ontario wineries. We're adapting to a changing environment."

~ Jamie Slingerland

Imagine using this new technique to take Cabernet Franc from a table wine to a premium wine, with markets developed at various price points, domestically and abroad.



Lisa Dowling, research associate at CCOVI, studies the drying grapes at Cave Springs barn with winemaker Angelo Pavan. Photo by Barb Tatarnic.



controlling their appassimento process with Corvina, Molinara and Rondinella varietals. Pillitterri Estates is bringing those varietals to Canada and through green shoot grafting, reproducing a thousand vines from 20 cuttings in three months. The goal is to establish those varietials, and to use the appassimento method to make amarone-type wines.

In other related research, VRIC's post-harvest specialist Bernard Goyette is using a chamber to control temperature, air flow and a third factor, humidity. He explains that the pilot project is drying 13 tonnes with a goal of 28 brix as the ultimate target. Angels Gate Winery and Rennie Estate Winery are participating in "We now understand the process and the product," says Young, who will be reviewing second-year research results next month. He thinks the economics will support the next step. That's for Angels Gate Winery to build a commercial facility that allows other wineries to take advantage of the economies of scale for appassimento-drying as well as the millesime process for making sparkling wines.

How quickly the appassimento-drying research is developed into accepted practice remains with vineyard managers and their winemakers. But as Young points out, a common Ontario varietal such as Cabernet Franc was in surplus a few years ago.

### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES

### Preharvest monitoring program measures grape maturity More real-time data on fruit ripeness translates into best-time harvests

### KAREN DAVIDSON

While 'bone dry' means many things to wine tasters, it's a term that's measurable for grape growers. The hot, bone-dry summer in Ontario translated into one of the earliest harvests on record. And growers knew exactly how heat and light were expressed in grape maturity.

This harvest, local grape growers and wine makers across Ontario have logged hundreds of times onto a website www.ccovi.ca/preharvest that posts data collected from four sites across the Niagara peninsula. The website is operated by Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) with technical outreach by Jim Willwerth. Fruit ripeness is measured in brix, titratable acidity, pH and volatile acidity. Four varietals are measured: Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

The 2012 season was very good for later maturing red varietals such as Syrah and the Bordeaux reds. The burden of proof will be on Dave Sheppard, winemaker at Coyotes Run Winery at St. Davids, Ontario, as he predicts a stellar vintage. He's one of the participants that takes advantage of the data published weekly.

While Sheppard measures for these characteristics on the 60acre Coyotes Run vineyard, he's interested in what's happening in other locations because the winery buys grapes from other growers.

"For our own sake, we want to compare our numbers with the equipment readings from Brock University which are more sophisticated," explains Sheppard. "The data helps us schedule and time harvest for specific varieties."

While some grape varietals registered ripeness in August, Sheppard didn't want to harvest too early. "I'd rather take grapes two weeks later with more colour in the reds and more sugar in the juice," he says.

Now in its third year of operation, the CCOVI website is educating growers on the differences from season to season. "Tracking



Dave Sheppard (R), winemaker for Coyotes Run Winery compares notes on grape maturity with Jim Willwerth (L) viticulturist with the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute. The three-year preharvest program has helped the St. Davids, Ontario winery make more calculated decisions on varietal harvest. Photos by Denis Cahill.

historical data and comparing seasonal influences give winemakers great insight into what's going on in their vineyards and provides a valuable benchmark," says Craig McDonald, senior winemaker for Trius Winery at Hillebrand. "It really sets up our harvest planning and varietal strategy within the different subappellations."

"This program is an integral part of CCOVI's outreach to the grape and wine industry," says Debbie Inglis, CCOVI director. "As the program evolves, the database will make it easier for growers to predict and monitor vintage variations."

### Here's how the program works

Cluster samples (15/block) are collected to account for within-cluster variation in berry ripeness. Sampling methodology is consistent for all blocks. Clusters are sampled in a grid-like pattern and taken from different positions of the canopy and on opposite sides of the row to ensure a representative sample.

The fruit is immediately analyzed by CCOVI Analytical Services for Brix (°Brix using an Abbe bench top refractometer), titratable acidity (titration using NaOH to



an end-point of pH 8.2), pH (using a Corning pH meter), and acetic acid (Megazyme acetic acid enzyme assay kit). This information is available weekly through a web-based database (www.ccovi.ca/preharvest) so that the maturation process can be tracked leading up to harvest. In addition, the current fruit composition of these varieties can be conveyed to the grape and wine industry. All grower information remains confidential to protect their anonymity. The website had more than 900 views during the 2012 harvest season, spanning 10 weeks. Increases in website traffic were noted on days when Twitter was used to announce preharvest updates.

It's funded by the Grape Growers of Ontario as well as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Developing Innovation Agri-Products Initiative.



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#### THE GROWER

#### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES

### Sour rot -- working to find a solution

#### WENDY MCFADDEN-SMITH

Grape growers in Ontario and the northeastern U.S. have been facing a new challenge over the past decade. Crops of early varieties are maturing beautifully, swelling and accumulating sugar and acquiring typical flavour compounds. And then it hits. The first of the berries start to turn that dreaded orangey-brown, brick colour, clouds of vinegar flies hover in the vineyard and the odour of vinegar scents the air. Sour rot!

Sour rot is found on thin-skinned, tight-clustered, earlier-maturing varieties: Riesling, Pinot Noir/Gris, Gewurztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Baco Noir. Some years, the disease is even a problem on later, thickerskinned varieties such as Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. It tends to be a problem when the pre-harvest period is warm and wet, especially if there are heavy rains. Rain causes the berries to swell rapidly and split, allowing entry to the sour rot organisms. You may find sour rot where there has been physical injury to the berries, whether by insects such as grape berry moth or wasps, diseases such as Botrytis or powdery mildew or physical injury caused by hail.

For many years, sour rot was just considered a secondary problem that followed Botrytis bunch rot. However, in the past eight years, we've been paying more attention to this disease. Drs. Wendy McFadden-Smith (OMAFRA) and Debra Inglis (CCOVI), supported by Ontario Grape and Wine Inc. and the Niagara Peninsula Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, have shown that sour rot is a lot more complex than originally thought.

Cristina Huber, PhD candidate at Brock University, has determined that the acetic acid bacteria, Acetobacter and Gluconobacter, and the yeast, Hanseniaspora uvarum are common in all vineyards with sour rot. In lab tests, the acetic acid bacteria can infect grape berries without visible injury but only if they are inoculated at the base of the berry where it attaches onto the stem. They can also infect anywhere on the berry if there is any wound. Hanseniaspora cannot infect unless there is a wound or the berry has already been infected by acetic acid bacteria. We've also discovered that berries do not appear to be very susceptible to sour rot until they reach somewhere between 13 and 15° brix. When berries of Riesling and Pinot Noir were inoculated at brix ranging from 9.7 to 15.5, sour rot was much more severe on the most mature berries.

### We've also taken a

multi-pronged approach to sour rot management. Since tight-clustered varieties are most susceptible, plant hormones have been targeted to stretch out the rachis (bunch stem) and loosen clusters. In an attempt to reduce the number of berries per cm of rachis, the bottom six leaves were removed from each shoot before first capfall. This is meant to starve the flowers so that fewer will be fertilized and set fruit. The jury is still out as the results seem to be inconsistent from year to year and between varieties but we will continue to pursue this.

Another approach is to make the skins tougher so that they're more resistant to splitting. We borrowed a method used in cherry production and applied

calcium at different rates and timings. We also tried removing leaves in the fruiting zone as early as immediate post-bloom rather that waiting until pea-size berry or veraison since it has been reported that earlier exposure causes thicker waxy cuticles that may be more resistant to splitting. The results from this are inconsistent as well.

The last approach is to change the organisms on the surface of the fruit and reduce infection. We have screened a number of compounds including potassium metabisulphite (KMS), potassium bicarbonate (Milstop fungicide), hydrogen peroxide, chlorine



Sour rot

dioxide, vermicompost, seaweed extract, oxysilver nitrate (Agress), various fungicides labelled for sour rot and a few biocontrol agents with some success. We've also been trying to identify when sprays should be initiated, starting as early as veraison and as late as three days before harvest. Some of the treatments look promising; however, if you wait until sour rot is well developed in the vineyard, it's too late and nothing will help.

We understand sour rot better than we did but there is still much more to learn.

Wendy McFadden-Smith is OMAFRA's tender fruit and grape IPM specialist.



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### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES

### Custom-crushing creates a buzz in B.C.

### KAREN DAVIDSON

Okanagan Crush Pad has uncorked a new business model. Just one year after opening, the custom-crushing winery has already doubled capacity to accommodate the high demand for its services in Summerland, B.C. The 2012 harvest will crush grapes from 12 clients to make 34,000 cases of small-lot wine from 100 per cent B.C. grapes.

The early success has turned skeptics into believers after Christine Coletta and husband Steve Lornie built the facility for their own house wines. Cutting through the red tape wasn't easy, but Coletta's long experience in the industry helped her steer through the minefields.

#### How does it work?

First, they had the minimum land requirement of two acres by owning the 10-acre vineyard, Switchback, to meet provincial standards for a land-based winery license. Other hurdles involved developing very specific contracts between Okanagan Crush Pad and their clients, outlining the terms for both licensed wineries and non-licensed "brand owners." Unless you 'own' a winery license you are not able to manufacture wine. Brand owners participate by sharing the profits of the wine once it is sold. It is a complex model that relies on contract details and a huge amount of trust on the abilities of all involved.

Despite regulations and contractual intricacies, the biggest challenge is changing the mind-set of the wine industry which viewed Okanagan Crush Pad's model as cutting corners and breaking down the barriers to entry. Okanagan Crush Pad maintains that the more people who are highly engaged in the art of making premium wine, the greater potential for overall growth.

"If you have passionate people who are being professionally guided, the end result can only be positive for the entire industry,"



Okanagan Crush Pad has doubled its custom-crushing capacity to 34,000 cases of small-lot wine.

notes Coletta. "It does not serve our reputation to have people struggle to make wine with the end result impacting on quality."

Okanagan Crush Pad provides a suite of services that can take wines from field to market, from the vineyard development and winemaking, to the branding, marketing, communications, distribution and sales. No doubt the mix of services will evolve over time.

Not every small winemaker may want the full gamut of services. Some want to tend their family-owned vineyard and consult with a winemaker on the best way to bottle for family consumption. Others may be start-up wineries that can't afford the 500-case minimum in their early years. Sharing the cost of equipment and staff is an appealing alternative.

"Okanagan Crush Pad is 100 per cent in compliance with B.C. liquor laws and facilitates the licensing and documentation of all wines that are created here," says Leeann Froese, communications director. She notes that this B.C. development follows the trends set in other winemaking regions including New Zealand, Germany and California.

### What came first? Grapes or the egg?

Harking back to centuries-old practices in the Old World, concrete tanks are de rigeur again. Following on the heels of some California winemakers, Okanagan Crush Pad has installed six, eggshaped, temperature-controlled vessels to ferment the varietals of Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The concept is that all the juice ferments equally, with no juice, skins or seeds getting caught in corners. The juice circulates up the sides of the vessel and down the middle in a natural motion. Mimicking an oak barrel, these concrete tanks allow for some oxidation without imparting oak flavour.

Clients have access to other state-of-the-art equipment including a wide range of presses and open top fermenters with a punch-down arm. It's all housed in a modern concrete and glass structure, built in harmony with its desert-like environment.

Okanagan Crush Pad is also leading by example and the team is honing their viticultural practices at both Switchback and their new 312-acre Garnet Valley Ranch site. The vineyards have been GIS mapped to determine



Six egg-shaped concrete tanks have been installed for fermentation. Photos courtesy of Okanagan Crush Pad.

variation in soils and dozens of eight-foot-deep holes, called calicuttas, have been dug throughout to determine soil structure.

"We want to scoop out the stratus of soil so that we can prescribe exactly what is needed for the health of the vines," explains Froese. "We have hired the best terroir expert, Pedro Parra from Chile, to help us develop the planting regime and to develop the best practices for water, plant health and vineyard management."

#### Who are the clients?

The first client was Okanagan Crush Pad's head winemaker Michael Bartier who wanted his own Bartier Bros. brand. Since opening, Bill and Darlene Freding have subscribed to the service after growing grapes for 15 years in Oliver. They are myth busters in their own right, as fourth-generation ranchers originating in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of B.C. They moved 'stock, lock and barrel' – pun intended – to Oliver in 1988. Their Angus cattle graze contentedly beside Saddle Ridge Vineyard which is managed without insecticides and with quality compost. In a virtuous cycle of sustainable farming, they have access to wood chips, grape skins and stems and of course manure from their feedlot to recycle back to the land. With all that history, it's no surprise that their wine brand is dubbed Rafter F.

Others have joined this eclectic group of grape growers. Jay Drysdale and Wendy Rose have made a brand of sparkling wine called Bella. Ed and Vicki Collett are putting Kamloops on the map as a new frontier of grape growing with their Harper's Trail brand.

In the competitive world of wineries, Okanagan Crush Pad has been the catalyst for a more collaborative approach. The model bears watching as several new wine-growing regions emerge across the country.





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### FOCUS: GRAPES AND WINERIES

### Ontario wines are celebrated at legislature

Every year, the Grape Growers of Ontario, together with the Honourable Speaker of the Legislature, host the annual wine tasting event at Queen's Park. This year, Speaker Dave Levac of Brant County, announced that the following wines have been chosen as the official wines of the

Ontario Legislative Assembly for 2012-13.

Red Wine: 2011 Conspiracy from The Foreign Affair Winery, Vineland White Wine: 2009 Burning Ambition from Small Talk Vineyards, Niagara-on-the-Lake



L-R: Bill George, Bill Schenck, Jim Morrison, Steve Pohorly, Ontario Speaker of Legislature Dave Levac, 2012 Grape King Curtis Fielding, Matthias Oppenlaender, and Debbie Zimmerman.

### Prince Edward County in the spotlight

Prince Edward County wines are proving strong competitors with the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair awarding gold to The Grange of Prince Edward Estate 2010 Riesling as the highest scoring wine. It also won honours for Best in Show.

More than 100 of Ontario's best wines from established producers were judged by some of Canada's top wine critics.

"Our wine is made from only

grapes that I grow myself on my family farm in Prince Edward County," says Caroline Granger. "I love that this Riesling is one of our LCBO general list products, meaning we can get the best of what we do out there for people to try. This is proof that Prince Edward County can produce excellent and affordable wines."

This white wine retails for \$14.95 at the LCBO.

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recently announced the approval of a minor use label expansion for Kocide 2000 fungicide (copper hydroxide) for control of downy mildew on grapes in Canada. Kocide 2000 was already labeled for use on turf, beans, tomatoes, peppers and potatoes in Canada and has a proven record of providing producers with effective disease management.

Downy mildew management in grapes has been a high priority item for a number of years and the registration of Kocide 2000 fungicide will provide grape producers with an effective and useful disease management tool.

The following is provided as an abbreviated, general outline only. Users should consult the

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