



# Northern Grapes News

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## Introducing the Northern Grapes Project

By Tim Martinson, Cornell University

A collaborative effort involving twelve universities, with the support of 19 producer groups ranging from Nebraska to New Hampshire has resulted in a new research and extension project that we are calling the *Northern Grapes Project*.

**Starting point.** The basic premise behind the project is that new grape varieties – both from the University of Minnesota and private breeders – have made it possible to produce grapes in regions previously considered too cold to support grape production. Since the late 90s, these cultivars have spawned a new industry. Based on our survey of producer organizations, over 3,000 acres of cold-hardy grapes are spread across the upper Midwest and New England, most under 10 years old. Conservatively, the cold-climate cultivars support over 330 small wineries in twelve northern states.

'Frontenac', released in 1996, was the first of the cold-hardy cultivars from the University of Minnesota wine grape breeding program, led by Jim Luby and Peter Hemstad.

photo courtesy University of Minnesota,  
David L. Hansen



These varieties have unique characteristics that will dictate different production and winemaking practices. Wines made from them will require sustained marketing and promotion to consumers to drive sales and development. Finally, many producers are new to not only growing grapes and making wine, but also managing a retail sales operation. Sustained education will be needed to hone skills producers will need to be successful.

**Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI).** The SCRI is a relatively new USDA program that emphasizes coordinated, multi-disciplinary projects, and provided a good fit with the developing cold climate wine industry. Through a planning grant, we were able to convene workshops in Vermont and



Participants in a Cornell University Wine Analysis Workshop are learning to measure sulfur dioxide in wine. Similar workshops will be held during the course of the Northern Grapes Project.

photo courtesy Cornell University, Chris Gerling

Minnesota in 2010 with representation from regional grower organizations and university researchers to hear about industry needs and ways in which they can be addressed.

**The Project.** Our project, entitled *Northern Grapes: Integrating viticulture, winemaking, and marketing of new cold-hardy cultivars supporting new and growing rural wineries* was a direct outcome of these planning meetings. The five-year Coordinated Agriculture Project (CAP) grant we received covers three broad areas: crop production, processing (winemaking), and consumers/markets.

**Research areas.** Multi-disciplinary studies over the course of the project will address four areas:

- **Varietal Characteristics:** Trials will address how vines perform in different climates and their resulting fruit and wine flavor attributes.

- **Viticultural Practices:** Develop appropriate viticultural practices to achieve consistent fruit characteristics for winemaking.

- **Winemaking Practices:** Applying winemaking practices to the unique fruit composition of cold-climate cultivars to produce distinctive, high quality wines that consumers like and purchase.

- **Consumers/Marketing:** Understanding consumer preferences and individual or regional marketing strategies

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that will increase sales and growth of wines made from cold climate cultivars and result in sustained profitability of wineries and vineyards.

**Partnerships and Collaboration.** Much of our research effort will involve collaboration and active participation of individual growers and 19 industry associations that supported the grant application and are providing in-kind and financial matching support to the effort. Over 15 cooperators will collaborate in vineyard trials or have pledged fruit for use in winemaking trials.



A soybean field surrounds grapes at Fieldstone Vineyards' (Redwood Falls, MN) original location. Cold-hardy grape cultivars have resulted in diversification on farms traditionally dedicated to row crop production.

*photo courtesy University of Minnesota, David L. Hansen*

**Baseline Survey and Marketing Information.** Our economics/marketing team will be asking for participation in a first-year "baseline survey" of production (see article this issue) and will engage producers in gathering information supporting marketing, "branding" and tasting room management. Results will be directly incorporated in workshops and research-based information that we hope will assist you in planning and managing your businesses.

**Extension.** Education is a central part of the project. We want to make sure that what we learn is communicated as it becomes available and that we get feedback from producers about how the information has influenced your practices.

Our extension effort will provide producers scattered over 12 states with access to a broader range of expertise and research-based information and resources than would be possible with twelve individual programs. Simply put, it makes sense to pool our resources across state lines:

- *Northern Grapes Webinars* will provide an in-depth look at specific topics in grape growing, winemaking, and marketing of cold-climate wines, in an interactive format accessible over the internet (see article this issue).

- *Northern Grapes Symposia* will provide annual summaries and in-depth presentations at winter conferences in the

Midwest and Northeast.

- *Northern Grapes Enterprise Workshops* will include field days and workshops with hands-on demonstrations and activities, in each of the participating states.

- *Northern Grapes News.* This newsletter, to be published quarterly in electronic format, will feature project news and updates, profiles of project team members, and feature articles explaining different research areas of the Northern Grapes Project.

**Outcomes.** The project's overriding goal is to support and enhance the growth and development of your wineries and vineyards. By the end of the five-year project, we are looking toward the following outcomes:

- Production and sales of wines made from cold-climate cultivars will double.

- Improved quality resulting from better growing and winemaking practices will improve customer retention and drive repeat sales.

- Cold-climate cultivars will establish unique regional marketing identities in their areas.

- Wineries will understand and apply business and tasting room management practices that drive sales.

- Wineries and vineyards will transition from "startup" status to "sustained profitability."

As project director, I am very excited to be involved in this project. Here in New York, I have watched new producer groups come together to learn and start new businesses in places where ten years ago, we wouldn't have dreamed of growing grapes. They have accomplished much in a short period of time.

I believe that research-based information produced through this project will play a key role in the industry's future. On behalf of the project team, we look forward to working together with you on this new project. Stay tuned!



Coyote Moon Vineyard, in Clayton, NY grows University of Minnesota grape cultivars. Owner Phil Randazzo is a member of the Project Advisory Committee and donated space in a vineyard for field trials.

*photo courtesy University of Minnesota, David L. Hansen*

# Managing Acidity in the Winery Kicks Off Northern Grapes Webinar Series

By Chrislyn Particka, Cornell University

On January 10th, we inaugurated the Northern Grapes Webinar series with an excellent overview of acid management in the winery, a topic near and dear to the hearts of those who make wine out of cold-climate cultivars. Murli Dharmadhikari (Iowa State University) and Anna Katharine Mansfield (Cornell University) covered chemical and microbial methods for reducing acidity to an audience of 140 during two live broadcasts.

There was lively activity at the “chat bar,” where participants typed in questions and comments, and Chris Gerling (Cornell University) responded to questions. Participants also enjoyed the convenience of accessing the program from their home computers and being able to interact with the speakers and fellow participants from 14 different states.

The audience response from the post-webinar survey was quite positive; 80% of respondents said the webinar changed their knowledge of the subject at a moderate or higher level, and 90% thought the logistics and technical quality of the webinar were satisfactory. Participants also gave us many valuable comments and great ideas for future webinar topics, which we look forward to presenting as the series continues.

Our February 14th webinar, *Nuts and Bolts of Canopy Management* with Mike White and Tim Martinson, was also

well-received, and is available for viewing, along with the first webinar, on the Northern Grapes Webinars website.

Our goal with this monthly series is to present an in-depth look at specific topics related to growing, producing, and marketing wines made from cold-hardy northern grape cultivars. Webinars will be held on the second Tuesday of each month at Noon Eastern (11 am Central) and again at 7 pm Eastern (6 pm Central). During each webinar, we will

feature two speakers offering different perspectives on the same topic. Monthly webinars will continue through at least June – as long as we have an audience – before taking a break until after the 2012 crush.

We also want to encourage active participation by the audience. While we can't broadcast participants' voices, we encourage viewers to type in questions

and comments during the presentations.

The March 13th webinar will be *Setting the Stage for Future Growth: Winery Collaboration and Economic Impact* with Bill Gartner (University of Minnesota) and Dan McCole (Michigan State University).

For more information, please visit the Northern Grapes Webinar Series Website at

<http://blogs.cornell.edu/northerngrapeswebinars/>

*“Awesome job - I am thrilled to hear that this program exists. Everyone did a fantastic job. This is applicable to all levels of production; large growers down to small backyard growers.”*

*-webinar participant*

## Partnering Industry Associations

Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association  
Illinois Grape Growers and Vintners Association  
Iowa Wine Growers Association  
Lake Champlain Wines  
Massachusetts Farm Wineries and Growers Association  
Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council  
Minnesota Grape Growers Association  
Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Association  
New Hampshire Winery Association

New York Wine and Grape Foundation  
Northern Illinois Wine Growers  
Northern New York Wine Grape Growers  
Scenic Rivers Grape and Wine Association  
South Dakota Specialty Producers Association  
Upper Hudson Valley Wine and Grape Association  
Vermont Grape and Wine Council  
Western Iowa Grape Growers Association  
Wisconsin Grape Growers Association

Visit us on-line at [www.northerngrapesproject.org](http://www.northerngrapesproject.org)

# Baseline Survey Slated for This Spring

By Bill Gartner, University of Minnesota and Paul Lasley, Iowa State University

As part of the Northern Grapes Project, we will be distributing a baseline acreage, production and economic impact survey to growers and wineries in the states participating in the project. In this article, we'll describe why we're collecting this information and how to participate.



The tasting room at Seven Hawks vineyard in Fountain City, Wisconsin, features wines made from cold-hardy grapes. All of the fruit used in their wines is locally-grown.

*photo courtesy University of Minnesota, David L. Hansen*

**Economic Impact of Cold Hardy Grapes.** The United States is now the world's top consumer of wine, with California being the major production area. A look through the aisles of local wine retail shop will reveal the usual suspects; Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Shiraz, etc. Rarely will one find wines made from cold-hardy grapes such as Marquette, Frontenac, or La Crescent. To find wines such as these, one most likely has to travel to the place of production - the winery.

Wineries in northern states are not new, but for many consumers it seems that way. For a long time only a handful of wineries were operating in states like Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Iowa and wineries in traditional grape-growing states such as Michigan and New York were producing more juice than wine.

Today, that is changing. These wineries are opening up a whole new frontier in wine production; this not only brings some unique wines to the market, but also brings tourists to the small towns where most of these wineries are located, which are often rural areas. It is important that we understand this emerging industry as it has great potential for business growth while it assists in community development. And this is why we need your help!

**The Survey.** Over the next six months the University of Minnesota and Iowa State University are teaming up to survey the growth and development of the cold hardy grape industry. This survey work complements numerous other viticulture, oenology and marketing components of the overall project. We need to measure project outcomes, but more importantly, we need to understand where the industry is headed so that assistance can be provided where it is needed most. If you are a grower or run a winery, you will be receiving an internet-based questionnaire from us. We will be asking for information about expenditures, visitors and characteristics of the operation.

During the fifth year of the project (2017), we will be sending out a follow-up survey to track changes in acreage, production, and employment in order to track the impact of the Northern Grapes Project and document industry growth and development.

Please take the time to help us and yourself understand and grow this new cold hardy grape industry.

**How to Participate.** We will be working with state Northern Grapes Project extension representatives and your state or regional producer associations to develop a mailing and contact list for this online survey, to be distributed and completed in March and April of this year. If you're not a member of one of these groups (see list of partnering industry associations) and wish to participate, please send your contact information to Chrislyn Particka (cap297@cornell.edu).

**Questions.** Any questions can be directed to Bill Gartner (wcg@umn.edu) or Paul Lasley (plasley@iastate.edu). Thanks and enjoy these new wines in old bottles!



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**Cornell University**

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