

Grape industry makes big progress

By **LEN RICHARDSON**

THE winegrape and table grape industries have scored a couple of important breakthroughs recently. The first is a new technique that could eventually be used to make wine without added sulfites, which are associated with allergic reactions. The second is the California Table Grape Commission opening the door to an as yet untapped market: Russia.

Ozone preserves

A new technique that uses ozone to preserve grapes could help prevent allergies and boost healthy compounds at the same time, reports Jennifer Rohn in *Chemistry & Industry*. The same technique could be used in the winemaking process to produce healthier wines without the added sulfites that can cause asthma and other conditions in some people.

Mass-marketed grapes can remain in storage for months and are usually treated with sulfur dioxide to prevent decay. Although the sulfur dioxide is effective, it is corrosive and can cause severe allergic reactions. Winemakers have a similar problem in that the sulfites added to wines to prolong shelf life and allow aging can make them unpalatable to some drinkers.

Francisco Artes-Hernandez and researchers at the Technical University of Cartagena in Spain compared several preservative methods with a new technique. It involves exposing macroperforated packages of grapes to ozone. They found that ozone treatment was 90% as effective as sulfur dioxide at preventing decay. In addition, ozone-treated grapes had up to four times more antioxidants than untreated grapes.

Antioxidants — natural compounds found in red wine, chocolate, coffee and many fruits — are believed to help prevent a variety of diseases including cancer and neurodegeneration. Why antioxidant levels increase after ozone treatment is not yet known, but because these compounds are increased in response to environmental stress in plant cells, it could be that the ozone is perceived as a biochemical insult.



GRAPE EXPECTATIONS: Susan Day, vice president of international marketing for the California Table Grape Commission, discusses grape trade with Marat Mustafae, a produce importer from St. Petersburg, Russia.

Key Points

- Using ozone to preserve grapes could help prevent allergies.
- Ozone-treated grapes have four times more antioxidants.
- Russia is a potentially lucrative market for exporting fresh grapes.

Because winegrowers don't store grapes for prolonged periods, they are unlikely to use ozone in any preservation process, says Andrew Waterhouse, chairman of the Department of Viticulture at University of California Davis. He agrees, however, that the ozone process could be tweaked to replace problematic sulfites added to wine during the liquefaction process, presenting the possibility of healthier, more hypoallergenic wines.

Such advancements in developing

healthier and safer grapes and wine could potentially increase demand. However, the grape industry is already experiencing other new marketing opportunities.

The Russians are buying

Having opened a number of new markets in recent years, California's fresh-grape industry is now eyeing Russia as a potentially lucrative place to export fresh California grapes.

Susan Day, vice president of international marketing for the California Table Grape Commission, traveled to Russia to meet with U.S. trade officials and Russian produce importers. She also met with importers and exporters from all over the world in Berlin at Fruit Logistica, an international trade fair for fruit and vegetable marketing.

The Russian visit followed a trip to the country by Day two years ago to ex-

plore the potential of this previously untapped market. In 2006, exports of fresh California grapes to Russia topped 335 metric tons, according to USDA figures.

"The Russian people like the quality and the large size of grapes grown in California," says Day. "Also, the fruit is available in November and December when there is limited fresh fruit available in Russia."

The Russian economy is booming with its large oil reserves. "Russia has the potential to become a major market for our industry," Day says. "There is significant interest from the Russian produce industry to increase imports of California grapes."

Exports of fresh California grapes have risen substantially in recent years, largely because of trade expansion efforts and the opening of new markets. Exports to offshore markets and Mexico from 2001-05 increased 30% by volume.

Contact us

Editor: Len Richardson
lrichardson@farmprogress.com
125 Ryan Industrial Court, Suite 107
San Ramon, CA 94583
Phone: 925-855-9409
Fax: 925-855-9578

Contributing Editors:
Brenda Carol; Eric McMullin; Arian Suderman;
J.T. Smith; Alan Newport; John Otte, Economics

Executive Editor: Dan Crummett

Corporate Editorial Director:
Willie Vogt, 651-454-6994,
wvogt@farmprogress.com

Sales: Sandy Creighton 559-433-9343

Subscription Questions:
800-441-1410

Fast find

Vol. 290 No. 4

■ California News Net	1
■ California Provocateur	16
■ Specialty/Field Crops	18
■ Marketplace/Classified	25
■ Land Management	30
■ A Taste of California	32
■ Ultimate Farm Shop	34
■ Dairy/Livestock	38
■ Natural Resources	42
■ Market Intelligence	44



Keep up on ag news in the region. Check out www.CaliforniaFarmer.com. We feature updates on a wide range of topics, marketing data and weather information you can put to work in your operation.



HEALTH TREATMENT: Ozone-treated grapes may help prevent allergies while also adding healthy antioxidants.

POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to *California Farmer*, 191 S. Gary Ave., Carol Stream IL 60188