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Wine Industry Task Force Meets on Smoke Exposure Issues

SACRAMENTO, Aug. 1, 2019 – Wine industry members from California, Oregon and Washington last week gathered to address the many commercial issues that can arise when winegrape vineyards are exposed to wildfire smoke.

Leaders from the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG), Oregon Winegrowers Association and Washington Winegrowers convened a daylong meeting of an 18-person West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force, supported by experts including enology scientists, a contract lawyer and crop insurance professionals. The task force met in Sacramento on July 24.

Task force members agreed to focus efforts on:

- Identifying research priorities to better understand the effects of smoke exposure on winegrapes and wine quality;
- Identifying and describing tools and information that can help growers and wineries effectively assess and manage risks to wine quality associated with smoke exposure;
- Developing guidance and best practices that promote effective communication between growers and wineries, and minimize the uncertainty and disruptions in commercial relationships arising from concerns over smoke exposed grapes; and
- Improving crop insurance as an effective risk management tool for wildfire and smoke exposure events.

To address the above key goals, the task force established three subgroups led by experienced industry professionals:

- Science: Alisa Jacobson, Joel Gott Wines
- Contracts: Patrick Rawn, Two Mountain Winery and Mike Testa, Coastal Vineyard Care
- Crop Insurance: Gregg Hibbets, Mesa Vineyard Management

“I’m very pleased by the initial meeting of the West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force,” said CAWG President John Aguirre. “To have the engagement of industry groups, growers and winery professionals from California, Oregon and Washington is a real benefit to this collaborative effort.”

Oregon Winegrowers Association President and CEO Tom Danowski said, “With smoke exposure events occurring more frequently and with longer durations, we’re facing serious disruptions to industry relationships and growers’ livelihoods. I’m encouraged the task force is committed to helping growers and winemakers in all three states work together to more fully understand and offset those risks.”

Washington Winegrowers Executive Director Vicky Scharlau said, “Wildfire is a no-warning event that impacts the entire grape-to-wine process, making smoke a shared risk between grower and vintner. This task force is a welcome structure that allows our formidable industry to proactively address this silent foe with science and communication.”

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