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Changes in the California Grapevine Registration and Certification Program

By Judit Monis, Ph. D

Above Photo: New Plantings in Napa Valley, June 2008

In order to obtain healthy vineyards, pathogen-free material should be planted. Countries around the world and many states within the United States have developed certification programs that establish a foundation of disease-tested grapevines for distribution to nurseries and growers.

Most certification programs are voluntary and open to participants who fulfill and follow all required rules. Nurseries further propagate the material from the certification program to create increase blocks and to produce grafted vines and rootstock to distribute to growers. Most certification programs limit their disease testing efforts to viruses. Researchers throughout the world can discover new viruses and develop new detection methods. To keep certification programs current, the foundation mother plants and vines from nursery increase blocks need to be re-tested routinely.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Registration and Certification (R&C) Program is under revision. A draft of the regulations was open to comments until March 12, 2010. On April 29, 2010 CDFA informed all interested parties that the final regulations were submitted to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for review. If the OAL approves the regulations, these will be filed with the Secretary of State and will take effect in the next couple of months.

The final Grapevine R&C regulations will include rules for traceability to original foundation blocks as well as field and laboratory tests to assure that the vines in the program have higher standards. Planting location must be approved by CDFA prior to planting. The new requirements include specific distance of increase blocks (a minimum of 100 feet) from non-registered vineyards. Additionally, the site cannot include any land on which non-registered grapevines have been grown in the past 10 years.

A comprehensive list of viruses and methodologies will be prescribed for mother and propagative vines. It is expected that vines found to be infected with a virus from the list will be disqualified from the program. To help increase the percentage of certified material available to growers, the new regulations will allow for secondary increase blocks. The propagative material used for the establishment of secondary increase blocks could originate from foundation or primary increase block cuttings and must be registered with CDFA. The same planting site requirements must be met for the establishment of a primary or secondary increase blocks.

Under the new regulation, plantings from the old R&C program will not be phased out. To understand the potential quality of grapevine planting material, it is necessary to obtain history information about age, disease testing, origin of material (primary, secondary, or outdated regulation increase blocks). New detection methods will continue to be implemented

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as they are developed. Therefore, healthier plantings will derive from new foundation and increase blocks. Similarly, since the plantings generated from foundation stock covered by the new regulation will be subjected to more sophisticated tests, plantings from the older generation blocks might have a higher probability of infection. Because viruses and other pathogens can spread from adjacent vineyards, it is important to work with a knowledgeable vineyard consultant or plant pathologist to inspect the increase blocks and adjacent vineyards for insect vectors and/or suspicious symptoms.

A new program "The National Clean Plant Network (NCPN)" has made funds ($20 million over a five year period) available for the testing and production of grapevine and other fruit crop clean stock. The funding and guidelines will allow the planting of the Russell Ranch foundation block at University of California Davis Foundation Plant Services (FPS). The new foundation block is expected to be planted in the spring of 2011 with material produced using the "shoot tip" tissue culture technique – a method that allows the elimination of certain viruses and bacteria. Deborah Golino (FPS Director) announced that nurseries will be able to supply virus-tested progeny material to growers as early as 2015.

It is exciting news that high quality disease-tested planting material will become available to vineyards throughout United States in the near future. Yet growers and nurseries need to develop routine testing programs to assure disease free planting stock remains disease-free. The first step to a disease-free vineyard is to plant clean stock material. Many growers rely on planting "healthy looking" material from their own or neighboring vineyards. Derived vines should be planted with caution as many vineyards could harbor pathogens without showing notable signs of infection. To insure disease-free status, representative samples should be submitted to a laboratory to test for major disease-causing agents (i.e., viruses, bacteria, and fungi). To assure the highest quality, planting material from certified sources, should always be tested.

While it may seem easy to obtain vines that are pathogen-free, a challenge voiced by nurseries and growers is that it is difficult to maintain a clean stock from becoming infected from neighboring vineyards. Future voluntary programs that include solely planting vines from reputable certification programs complemented by internal routine testing programs will result in vineyards free of disease.

Please contact Judit Monis (juditmonis@eurofinsus.com) if you like to discuss the information or have questions about our grapevine disease testing program.