

Bushfires leave a bad taste for wine lovers

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Australian winemakers are turning to the University of Adelaide to help identify grape varieties that are less susceptible to smoke from summer bushfires.

Oenology lecturer Dr Kerry Wilkinson will lead a collaborative project to counter wines produced in smoke-affected areas that exhibit flavours described as "burnt, ash-tray, acrid and metallic".

Over the past five years, wine regions across Australia have reported financial losses and a decline in product quality following either bushfires or prescribed burns.

Dr Wilkinson says the industry needs grape and wine production methods which minimise the uptake of smoke by vines or the extraction of smoke-derived aroma compounds during winemaking.

"We also hope to identify grape varieties suitable for planting in smoke-prone areas and find new techniques to detect smoke taint in juice and wine," she says.

The University is partnering with industry representatives and Primary Industries and Resources SA on the \$497,000 three-year project.

"The aims and outcomes of this research are of major significance and relevance to the Australian wine industry," Dr Wilkinson says.

"From a scientific perspective, our results will advance knowledge in the

fields of viticulture, plant physiology and biochemistry. From an industry perspective, this insight will enable grape growers and winemakers to make informed decisions to minimise smoke-tainted wine, yielding clear economic benefits."

The Australian wine industry is worth in excess of \$2 billion in domestic sales and more than \$3 billion in international sales, according to the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation.

Dr Wilkinson says wine is now third on Australia's list of agricultural exports (after meat and wheat), although the industry continues to face growing pressure from environmental conditions - drought in particular.

"While smoke taint is not an issue for all Australian wine regions, significant bushfires have occurred in most wine-producing states of Australia in the last five years and given the forecast for warmer summers, the problem is only going to get worse," she says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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