Grape Rootstocks Show Promise in North Coast

By Mark S. Arcamonte
Editor

According to some veteran pest control advisors and a Napa Valley winegrape grower in whose vineyard Type B phylloxera was first discovered in 1983, there are three important things for the industry to focus on when battling the pest: Research, research research.

Tucked off the side of picturesque St. Helena Highway, about 1.5 miles east of Rutherford, Calif. lies Baritelle Vineyard, where approximately 63 acres of cabernet sauvignon flourish in a pastoral, seemingly idyllic area of the Napa Valley.

In 1983, while cruising along in its second generation, Baritelle Vineyards came upon a vineyard threat that was so huge and so immediate it jarred the entire industry. That widely-documented emergency was a new strain of phylloxera that attacks and kills most rootstocks with vinifera parentage, such as AXR No. 1.

The discovery was a very unfortunate one for many North Coast winegrape growers, and for much more than just the obvious phylloxera-related reasons.

"This vineyard was where the phylloxera problem was first identified in the Napa Valley," said John Baritelle, owner of Baritelle Vineyards. "The pest had adapted itself to the AXR rootstock over time, and AXR was the rootstock of choice in the early 1980s."

In response to the emergency, University of California researchers entered the Napa Valley and planted a variety of different rootstocks to test for resistance to the new phylloxera. Among the survivors were St. George, Continued on Page 2

Non-shedding bark of 639-16 rootstock puts bite on N. Coast 'tudes.

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Supply, also located in Geyersville, said his 20 years of field experience has led him to pay close attention to the nutrient management of both his 1939 and 1939-16.

"I lean very hard to 1939-16 because of what Jim Baricelli has been able to do. His variety is cabernet, so I don’t know what would happen with a white grape variety under the same conditions," he said. Baricelli’s vineyard has 35 acres of cabernet vines that are 3 years old and, regardless of where they’re planted, have shown good vigor and productivity, according to Carlson.

"People haven’t typically put much phosphorus, and put it on in spots, but my mind has changed and I say to put it everywhwhere," he said. And from that point you really need to take the samples and tailor it to whatever you need.

"If you use liquid fertilizers it’s much easier to tailor your nutrients to your specific area. And everything that is being replanted now is almost without exception being put into with drip systems, so it becomes a very easy application method," said Carlson. Though Baricelli makes very strong qualifications for his praise of 1939-16, he says that he has had encouraging early results from the acreage he planted in 1989.

"There is no universal roofstock. Not only just in grapes, but peaches, citrus, almonds, walnuts, essentially all of your commercial perennial crops. These all require different genetic material for different situations," he said. "Soil type and climate affect the kinds of nematodes you’ve got, and therefore there’s no universal roofstock."

McKenzie said that the protection that’s offered by 1939-16 may be too narrow for growers like Stori and the Central Coast where endoparasites can also be a problem, but it may work for people on the North Coast.

Joint Venture Creates Wholesale Giant

A letter of intent has been signed to create a joint venture between Furmaid Industries Inc. and William-Elis Co. to create the largest wholesale distribution companies for crop protection products in the United States.

Stan Riemann, vice president of crop production and Brian Wilhurt Jr., vice president and CEO of William-Elis, said the joint-venture company will be named Willfarm LLC.

"Our combined sales volume is more than 50 Farmlard and William-Elis wholesale distribution locations in more than 20 states throughout the Central United States. The organization will provide wholesale distribution of row crop and turf protection products to independent and cooperative retailers throughout the central areas of the United States," said Riemann.

"We believe we can provide a more efficient, effective and flexible organization than the existing companies," said Riemann.

"We’ll bring the best elements of both companies together and, combined with the economies of scale and the competition offered by large distribution systems, we will be able to provide our customers with a better value than they could ever get," said Riemann.

The joint-venture will be owned equally and administrated by a board of managers comprised of 10 members from each of the five parent companies.

Riemann and Wilhurt emphasized that the new company will focus specifically on providing long-term services to independent and cooperative agricultural sales and service organization-retailers.

"We will serve the grower, the retailer and the retailer’s customer. We will strive to meet the needs of every customer," said Riemann.

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In addition to the wholesale distribution of crop protection products, Willfarm will introduce branded private-label products beginning in 1995. Those products will include private-label seed and grain protection products, specialty products for turf, and new products.

Furmaid Industries Inc. is one of the nation’s largest agricultural cooperatives, owned by about 1,500 growers. The company, which is 90% farm owned, was formed when 10 cooperatives merged in 1923. Willfarm LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Willfarm, can be found at 1150 Willfarm Rd., P.O. Box 5, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523. Phone: 925-446-6666. Fax: 925-446-6888.