

## **CROP PROTECTION IN UK VINEYARDS** **2 March 2009**



*Delegates enjoying the sunshine at lunchtime.  
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The AAB and the UK Vineyards Association (UKVA) teamed up to run a one day workshop on 2 March 2009 on Crop Protection in UK Vineyards. The venue was the purpose built Wine Centre at Plumpton College, near Brighton. The area of vines in the UK is growing and is now around 1,000 ha, comparable in area to some soft-fruit crops, so the organising committee felt it was an appropriate time to highlight this hitherto largely ignored (at least by the mainstream!) UK crop. The day was ably chaired by Bob Lindo (Camel Valley Vineyard), the current chairman of the UKVA, and the delegates were largely drawn from the UK vineyards industry.

The programme started with Chris Foss, Head of the Wine Department at Plumpton College, giving an overview of pest and disease problems and pesticide application practices, based on responses to a questionnaire sent out to delegates in advance of the meeting. This proved to be a useful scene-setter for the later speakers, as it helped highlight some of the key issues for growers, with disease control (particularly botrytis and powdery mildew) featuring strongly.

The theme of efficient and responsible pesticide application in vineyards was eloquently picked up by the next two speakers, Paolo Balsari (University of Turin, Italy) and Andrew Landers (Cornell University, USA). They drew on their extensive knowledge and research experience in both Europe and the USA on pesticide application in vineyards to explain to delegates how both simple and high-tech approaches could be taken to ensure that spray treatments were applied with the absolute minimum of drift and maximum possible impact on the target. Startling illustrations of how inefficient some sprayers could be gave everyone plenty of food for thought.

Kim Green (ADAS) brought the audience firmly back into the realms of biology with an overview of the biology and epidemiology of key diseases likely to be encountered by UK vine growers – fortunately her assessment coincided perfectly with the small survey discussed by Chris Foss at the start of the conference! Kim stressed the importance

of understanding disease biology in determining the most appropriate strategies for disease control, drawing on work done in the USA.

At lunch time, delegates were able to try their hand at wine assessment using the specialist wine-tasting facilities at Plumpton College. The session was introduced by Tony Milanowski (Plumpton College) who asked delegates to rate a range of white wines for autolysis-derived flavours ranging from 'toast' to 'brioche'.

In the afternoon session, Viv Powell (HDC) introduced delegates to the complexities of the potential impact on pesticide availability of changes in the European Union pesticide regulation regime – particularly important as losses of pesticides on major crops can have serious consequences for the availability of suitable Specific Off-label Approvals (SOLAs) for use on minor crops such as vines.

Jude Bennison (ADAS) returned to the biological theme with a review of likely pest issues on UK vines – likely because up to now pest problems have been relatively rare in UK vineyards. Jude also used the opportunity to explain how integrated pest management (IPM) programmes had been (and still are) being successfully developed for use in other outdoor fruit crops in the UK, pointing the way for vineyards should pests become more important.



*Delegates at the conference.  
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Bob Lindo rounded off the day with a personal take on what is necessary to produce wine successfully in the UK, particularly given that UK production is only at about 3% of the total UK wine market. His thesis was that because of climatic uncertainties in particular, UK growers needed to 'cast a wide net' in order to ensure sufficient fruit production in good years to provide a bank of product against the lean years when fruit-set was poor or even failed altogether.

The day was well-received by all the delegates, with an excellent mix of practical advice and more scientific information. Thanks are due to particularly to the UKVA without whose membership the day would not have been so successful.

*Dr Bill Parker, March 2009*