

COVER PAGE

Name of grantee: National Grape Cooperative

Name of grantee point of contact: Mr. Terry Holloway

Grant number: 791N13000101

Type of report: Final performance report

Date report is submitted: February 1, 2012

PROJECT TITLE

Implementation of the Michigan grape grower sustainability assessment workbook to enhance the competitiveness of the Michigan grape industries.

PROJECT SUMMARY

This grant was used to facilitate the completion of the Grape*A*Syst Program workbook and development of a Sustainability Action Plan by National Grape Cooperative grower members. The Grape*A*Syst Program is a collaborative effort between National Grape Cooperative, Michigan State University and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide Michigan's grape industries with a resource for implementing and measuring sustainable production practices.

This grant provided additional resources to National Grape for implementation of the Grape*A*Syst sustainability program to its grower members. This grant enabled the completion of the Grape*A*Syst Program and development of a Sustainability Action Plan by 171 Michigan grape growers (Obj. 1 and 2). This represents approximately 57% of Michigan juice grape producers, and we exceeded our target goal of having 45% of the industry complete this workbook by the end of the second year of this program. As a result of the combined efforts by National Grape Cooperative and its partners, approximately 44 Michigan grape growers are now participating in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) verification process (Obj. 3).

Consumers are becoming more concerned about how their food is produced and major food retailers are now requiring suppliers to demonstrate sustainability as part of their production process from field to table. National Grape is committed to providing a sustainability program that enhances the competitiveness of Michigan's grape industries in the global marketplace, and this grant provided resources in support of this initiative.

PROJECT APPROACH

To assist Michigan grape growers with completion of the Grape*A*Syst Program and develop of an action plan (Obj. 1 and 2). National Grape Cooperative hired two technicians to provide one-on-one assistance to its grower members. These technicians (Todd Tapper and Suzanne Forraht) concentrated their efforts in Van Buren County and Berrien County, respectively. These counties represent the majority of juice grape acreage farmed by National Grape grower members. Technicians met with individual growers to complete the workbook, record score, and complete an action plan for improving the sustainability of their farm. Paul Jenkins, the project leader for the development of the Grape*A*Syst Program at Michigan State University, assisted National Grape Cooperative with the completion the project objectives and requirements outlined in the grant agreement. Dr. Roger Brook, Running Water Publishing, began development of an online database and website for completing the Grape*A*Syst Program and Action Plan. National Grape made the program mandatory for its grower members in 2011, but did not have a concrete plan for enforcing this. The development of an online system was determined to be an important step in getting growers through the program on an annual basis. MAEAP verification criteria represents the highest level of sustainability for certain production practices in the Grape*A*Syst

Program. Completion of the Grape*A*Syst Program exposes growers to the benefits of MAEAP, and gives them a head start in the cropping system verification process. Through the engagement of growers in the Grape*A*Syst program, grower participation in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program is expected to increase (Obj. 3).

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Performance toward meeting our goals and outcomes was measured by the number of grape growers who completed the Grape*A*Syst Program workbook, generated scores, and completed the Sustainability Action Plan. By the end of the second year of this program, 171 Michigan grape growers completed the Grape*A*Syst Program and developed a Sustainability Action Plan (Obj. 1 and 2). As a direct result of funding by the Michigan Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, approximately 57% of Michigan juice grape producers have now completed the program. The work completed in 2011 exceeded our target goal of having 45% of the industry complete this workbook by the end of the second year of this program. As a result of the combined efforts by National Grape Cooperative and its partners, approximately 44 Michigan grape growers are now participating in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) verification process (Obj. 3). The number of growers pursuing MAEAP verification is approximate due to confidentiality of data.

BENEFICIARIES

The beneficiaries of this work are National Grape Cooperative, its grower members, and its wholly-owned subsidiary Welch's. Consumers are becoming more concerned about how their food is produced and major food retailers, such as Walmart, are requiring suppliers to demonstrate sustainability as part of the overall process from field to table. In order to become a preferred supplier, companies like National Grape/Welch's must have a sustainability program in place with their growers. The project benefits the above named groups by providing resources to remain competitive in the marketplace. Over 300 National Grape grower members farm approximately 12,000 acres of Concord and Niagara grapes in Michigan. Juice grape production represents over 80% of all grape production in Michigan, and the benefits and impact of this work extends to the families, communities, processing facilities, and local economies where juice grapes are grown.

LESSONS LEARNED

Sustainability continues to be an important topic, and remains a top priority for Michigan juice grape producers. While it was rather easy to work with the "early adopters" during the first year of this program, working with growers on a voluntary basis has proven difficult at times. National Grape decided to make the program mandatory in 2011, but this was still met with opposition by a large number of growers. For National Grape, this is a business decision and it is a decision that will help keep our industry competitive in the national market. Growers are becoming more accepting of the program over time, and many people view the program very differently once they have gone through it. Growers are learning not only how to become more sustainable, but also how to grow better quality grapes. The program also enables growers to be

proactive in their management decisions, achieve the desired outcomes, and avoid potential problems.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Grape*A*Syst website: <http://grapeasyst.org/>

As a result of this grant, and the successful implementation of the Grape*A*Syst sustainability program by National Grape and its partners, Michigan is now the lead for National Grape's national sustainability effort. Mr. John Jasper of the Michigan office has been named the lead for this national program, and Grape*A*Syst is the model that will be used by its grower members. National Grape has made the program mandatory for its grower members and is in the process of building a national online database and website for completing the program.