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## The Smoke Exposure Research Act of 2023

Increasingly frequent and catastrophic wildfires are threatening the long-term sustainability of important winegrowing regions and the vintners, vineyards, wineries, and the communities they support, particularly in California, Washington, and Oregon, the top three states for wine production in the U.S.

Not only can wildfires directly destroy vines and wineries, but even just the smoke from wildfires can damage wine grapes through prolonged smoke exposure, which can be absorbed into the grape and create an ashy taste known as “smoke taint,” compromising the quality and value of wine produced from these grapes.

*This problem is relatively new—smoke taint is still poorly understood.*

The “Smoke Exposure Research Act of 2023” would authorize \$32.5 million over five years to ensure the sustainability of the wine industry in the face of the climate crisis. Specifically, this bill would require the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Service, in coordination with land-grant universities and researchers with viticulture and enology expertise, to identify the compounds responsible for smoke taint; establish standard sampling, testing, and screening tools for use in vineyards and wineries; and develop new risk assessment tools, mitigation measures, and management strategies for growers.

As researchers from the University of California, Davis; Washington State University; and Oregon State University [explain](#), the impact of wildfire smoke exposure is not predictable.

“The impact of smoke taint isn’t always cut and dried. You can’t predict which grapes may have suffered damage based on anything intuitive, such as sight, smell or even the flavor of fresh grapes. Just because there’s smoke in the air doesn’t mean grapes are tainted. “There are so many variables,” [Anita] Oberholster, UC Davis enology specialist said. “Freshness of the smoke, number of times exposed, variety of grape — the list goes on. **There’s so much we don’t know.**”

Recognizing how much is at stake, Congress has provided \$5 million to the USDA to study smoke taint since Fiscal Year 2020. However, this research has never been formally authorized and instead relies upon annual appropriations and report language each year. The American wine industry generated over \$276 billion for the U.S. economy last year. As wine regions globally face the impact of the climate crisis, this critical research cannot wait.

*The “Smoke Exposure Research Act” is endorsed by the Wine Institute, the California Association of Winegrape Growers, and the University of California, Davis.*