

Date of Hearing: March 15, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
Robert Rivas, Chair
AB 54 (Aguiar-Curry) – As Introduced December 5, 2022

SUBJECT: Department of Food and Agriculture: research funding: winegrapes: smoke exposure

SUMMARY: This bill would require the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), upon appropriation by the Legislature in the Budget Act of 2023, to provide funding for research to investigate accurate measurement of smoke compounds in winegrapes and wine; methods to mitigate the damage to winegrapes and wine that can occur from exposure to smoke; and methods to prevent smoke damage to winegrapes and wine. Specifically, *this bill*:

- 1) Makes findings and declarations related to the wine industry in California, the impacts of wildfires and wildfire smoke on winegrapes and the need for research to better understand smoke impacts and solutions to reduce losses for winegrape growers and vintners.
- 2) Requires the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), upon appropriation by the Legislature in the Budget Act of 2023, to provide funding for research to investigate wildfire smoke impacts on California winegrapes, as specified.
- 3) Requires CDFA to create an advisory committee of nine people appointed by the secretary as follows:
 - a) Four people representing winegrape growers.
 - b) Four people representing vintners.
 - c) One person representing a public California university with experience in smoke effects on winegrapes or wine.
- 4) Allows a qualified researcher to submit a proposal for funding wildfire smoke impacts on California winegrapes research.
- 5) Requires the advisory committee to review research proposals submitted and to provide recommendations to the secretary of CDFA (secretary) for funding the research proposals.
- 6) Requires the secretary to accept the recommendation of the advisory committee and disburse the funds for a research proposal recommended by the advisory committee unless the secretary determines that the research proposal is not practicable or in the interest of the industry or the public.
 - a) Requires, if the secretary does not accept a recommendation of the advisory committee, the secretary to provide the advisory committee with the reasons for that decision within 15 days.
- 7) Provides this section shall become inoperative on January 1, 2028, or when all funds appropriated for purposes of this section have been disbursed, whichever is later.

- 8) Requires the secretary, after all funds disbursed for purposes of this section, to notify the Legislature of this fact, as specified.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the CDFA, under the control of the Secretary of CDFA (secretary), to promote and protect the agricultural industry of the state. (Food and Agriculture code (FAC) 100-105)
- 2) Allows CDFA to expend, in accordance with law, all money that is made available for its use. (FAC 201)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: Wildfires in California are continuing to increase in frequency and intensity, resulting in loss of life and damage to property, infrastructure, and ecosystems. In 2020 alone, wildfires burned more than 4.2 million acres. Thirteen of California's 20 most destructive fires occurred in the last five years, several in or near California's world-renowned winegrowing regions. While much of the Ag land in the Central Valley has seen a limited impact, the Coastal ranges and foothill communities on the edge of the Sierras have seen greater impact, especially for vineyards and grazing lands throughout the State. Altogether, the impact of recent wildfires on California's agriculture has been catastrophic and unprecedented.

California winegrapes have been impacted significantly by repeated wildfires in recent years. The 2020 fires are expected to cost vineyards and wineries \$3.7 billion. The grapes that weren't harvested due to smoke exposure from the 2020 wildfires cost winegrape growers \$601 million and are expected to result in lost wine sales of \$2.8 billion.

According to the author, there is a significant need for research into measurement, mitigation, and prevention of damage to winegrapes and wine that can occur from exposure to smoke. The ability to quickly and accurately measure the key smoke compounds responsible for smoke damaged wines and make sound decisions concerning the disposition of grapes and wines is a high priority. There is currently an understanding of how to measure smoke compounds in winegrapes; however, there is a high priority need to establish baselines for the presence of naturally occurring levels of smoke exposure marker compounds in grapes by variety and region. More research is also needed to correlate sensory characteristics of wines with chemical analyses of smoke exposure marker compounds in grapes. There is a significant need for research into rapid methods to measure smoke exposure molecules in vineyards. If this research is successful, it could deliver large scale, commercially available analyses that would benefit vineyards and wineries making harvest and purchasing decisions.

Sponsors state, an investment of \$5 million by the state of California to fund meaningful research into these important issues would help prevent repeated losses to California winegrape growers and wineries. This bill will help California's wineries and winegrape growers by creating an advisory committee to advise CDFA how to distribute state funds for research into measurement, mitigation, and prevention of smoke damage to California winegrapes. Little is known about how current measurements for smoke compounds ultimately equate to sensory quality in wine and more research is needed in this area. Vintners are in need of better understanding of tools that could be used during the winemaking process to mitigate the impacts of smoke exposure in winegrapes. Finally, it would be valuable to investigate potential tools to prevent smoke damage.

Previous Legislation:

AB 2213 (Aguiar-Curry) 2021: This bill would have require the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), upon appropriation by the Legislature in the Budget Act of 2022, to provide funding for research to investigate accurate measurement of smoke compounds in winegrapes and wine, methods to mitigate the damage to winegrapes and wine that can occur from exposure to smoke, and methods to prevent smoke damage to winegrapes and wine. Held in Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Agricultural Council of California
California Association of Winegrape Growers
California Chamber of Commerce
California Farm Bureau Federation
Community Alliance With Family Farmers
Family Winemakers of California
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)
Wine Institute

Opposition

None on file

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