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Oregon Wine Industry Optimistic as Harvest Nears

PORTLAND – October 6, 2011 – Oregon winegrowers are optimistic as harvest nears for the state’s \$2.7 billion wine industry. Harvest is expected to begin next week in many parts of the state, but the industry is taking it day-by-day with one eye on the ripening grapes and the other on the weather forecast.

Winegrowers and winemakers, accustomed to working with challenging conditions, are marshaling all their skills and patience to deal with cooler than normal weather and rainy periods headed into the crucial October harvest window.

Despite the weather conditions, it’s easy to be positive, said Leigh Bartholomew, vineyard manager for Archery Summit in the northern Willamette Valley. “We’ve known the harvest would be late since spring, so we’ve been planning for this all year long and that preparation is paying off. The grapes are tasting great.”

Oregon faced a historically late harvest in 2010 which affected the quantity of the harvest, but not the quality. Reports of early tastings of the 2010 vintage indicate it will be of excellent quality. “I just tasted through all our 2010s – reds and whites – and they are brilliant,” said Kara Olmo, co-owner and winemaker of Wooldridge Creek Winery and Vineyard in Southern Oregon’s Applegate Valley.

Despite the coolness of the growing season, Oregon experienced warm temperatures in August and early September that accelerated the ripening process. And, because of the early seasonal weather, the crop in the Willamette Valley is larger than last year which allowed for more selectiveness during late summer thinning, raising expectations for the quality of the 2011 vintage.

Varying conditions in the state’s primary wine growing regions as well as the wide variety of grapes grown will affect how the harvest actually plays out. But, one truism affects all of the wine growing regions – Oregon is a cool climate growing region. This not only means that Oregon

winegrowers are prepared for cool and moist conditions, but the conditions are vital to the success of the kind of wine that is Oregon's hallmark.

Cooler growing seasons often create the kind of conditions that Oregon winemakers crave – high acid and low alcohol wines that are in high demand because of how well they pair with food.

For instance, in the Willamette Valley, home of Oregon's signature Pinot noir grape, cooler temperatures and rain into the harvest window may not be as detrimental to Pinot noir as it would be to other varieties. "Pinot noir thrives in these conditions," said Bartholomew. "It's just a matter of being patient."

Growers around the state also emphasized that despite the current conditions, the plants remain healthy in all areas of the state. In Southern Oregon, the threat of frost damaging the harvest also seems remote.

About OWB:

The Oregon Wine Board (OWB) is a semi-independent Oregon state agency managing marketing, research and education initiatives that support and advance the Oregon wine and wine grape industry. The Board works on behalf of all Oregon wineries and independent growers throughout the state's diverse winegrowing regions. The Oregon wine grape and wine industry contributes more than \$2.7 billion of economic activity to the state economy each year, including more than 13,500 wine-related jobs.

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