

Vineland Research tests table grape varieties on local growers, retailers

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By Luke Edwards, Grimsby Lincoln News



John Misek, from Vinetech, tastes a variety of grape that Vineland Research and Innovation Centre is testing. Researchers hope the new varieties will help extend the season for Ontario grapes and bring new flavours to the market. - Luke Edwards/Metroland

LINCOLN — New varieties of table grapes may soon be hitting the shelves and despite the name, you don't have to get in a spaceship to go pick them up.

This week, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre invited local grape growers, nursery operators, and retailers to test some of the six trials that researchers have been testing since 2014. The trials are aimed at introducing new varieties to the market that could provide different-tasting grapes and extend the season for grown-in-Ontario grapes.

"The sovereign coronation harvest window is quite short and storage is quite short so we want to see at least Ontario grapes into October or even into November on local shelves," said Michael Kauzlaric, technology scout and grower outreach at VRIC.

Some of the six varieties that are in the trials weren't available for tasting — it's still a little early for most green varieties — but among those that were, the early returns had Jupiter blue variety as the favourite.

"It's got a strong flavour, almost like a muscately flavour," said John Misek of Vinetech, comparing the Jupiter variety to the more well-known muscat family of grapes.

VRIC's table grape program began in 2014. Since then, researchers have been growing the vines and observing how viable they are in the Ontario climate. Now that they're producing grapes, Kauzlaric and his team reached out to growers and grocers to get their feedback.

"Getting their feedback on what the ideal variety is," he said. "Get the conversation going, that's important."

VRIC tested different root stocks among the varieties, and tried to treat them like a typical Ontario grape grower would.

Representatives from local nurseries, grape growers, and grocers like Loblaws and Sobeys were on hand. They were all asked to fill out surveys, but based on the conversation it appeared the Jupiter variety was the favourite.

Grape grower Adolf Reddecopp agreed that Jupiter was the preferred grape. He grows both table grapes and grapes for wine, and while the wine grapes make up most of his operation, he said table grapes have potential.

"Anything green or red is what we really need," he said.

Of the six trials, VRIC did have three green varieties, those they weren't quite ready.

"We realize reds and greens are important," said Sarah Marshall, manager with Ontario Tender Fruit Growers.

Another nine varieties are currently being prepared for trials, Kauzlaric said, meaning there will be more options in the coming years.

"We're hoping to advance Jupiter and get some vines in the ground, some commercial plantings next year," he said. "So if those vines get planted next year, hopefully by 2020, 2021 there will be some farm stand product or even limited, small batch retail."

<https://www.niagarathisweek.com/news-story/7571642-vineland-research-tests-table-grape-varieties-on-local-growers-retailers/>