



*Vintners Quality Alliance Ontario*

## **Policy for Assessment and Evaluation of New Grape Varieties**

Improving or at least maintaining the quality of VQA wines should be the guiding principle governing the addition of new varieties. The process to evaluate new varieties will focus on expected quality improvements and enhancement of the appellation system. While new varieties may offer other benefits such as winter hardiness, disease resistance or higher yields, quality should always lead the discussion and additions that would negatively impact quality should be avoided.

The addition of a new permitted grape variety requires an amendment to VQA Regulation 406 and a formal request from a member winery. Requests for “new” grape varieties to be added to the VQA approved list can be categorized as follows:

### **1. *Vitis vinifera* varieties that are historically established as a wine-making grapes in traditional wine regions.**

These varieties are or have been in production in other regions of the world and have a significant track record in commercial wine-making. VQAO requires the following information as part of an application for recognition.

- History of use in wine production, current production areas
- Reasonable proof of 100% *vinifera* parentage
- Evidence of quality reputation and current success in other regions, and registration/recognition by regional appellation authorities or agricultural bodies
- Wines resulting from at least 2 vintages of production in Ontario
- A detailed rationale on why this new variety is expected to produce high quality wines in the conditions present in Ontario appellations

Process/ Criteria guidelines:

- A formal request must be received and the applicant should provide as much information as possible
- VQAO will verify parentage and registration/recognition in other jurisdictions as necessary.
- The quality of at least 2 wines (2 vintages) will be assessed by a standard chemical analysis and a series of taste panels. Tastings might include the VQA Ontario Standards Development Committee, one or more of the regular VQA tasting panels, an independent panel (from a sommelier guild or academic institution) or other panel that does not include direct participation from competitor wineries. A positive consensus across several panels is sought that supports the conclusion that the overall quality of wines made from the grape is consistently good with appropriate winemaking skills and knowledge.
- Market research may be conducted with consumers and/or with “influencers” or trade to determine if the addition of the variety promotes or deters from a “quality” perception. Varieties with significant negative perceptions will not be added to the VQA list until success in the premium wine category can be demonstrated.

- Proponents should provide a detailed rationale on why this new variety is expected to produce high quality wines in the conditions present in Ontario appellations.

## **2. New intra-species vinifera crosses**

These varieties are newly created varieties from 100% vinifera x vinifera breeding. No previous grape or wine production has been recorded. VQAO requires the following information as part of an application for recognition.

- Breeding history
- Proof of 100% vinifera parentage
- A legally acceptable name that has been introduced and peer reviewed through recognized horticultural journals and is published in a recognized compendium for named varieties of horticultural crops
- Wines resulting from at least 2 vintages of production in Ontario
- A detailed rationale on why this new variety is expected to produce high quality wines in the conditions present in Ontario appellations

Process/ Criteria guidelines:

- A formal request must be received and the applicant should provide as much information as possible
- VQAO will verify parentage as necessary.
- The quality of at least 2 wines (2 vintages) will be assessed by a standard chemical analysis and a series of taste panels. Tastings might include the VQA Ontario Standards Development Committee, one or more of the regular VQA tasting panels, an independent panel (from a sommelier guild or academic institution) or other panel that does not include direct participation from competitor wineries. A positive consensus across several panels is sought that supports the conclusion that the overall quality of wines made from the grape is consistently good with appropriate winemaking skills and knowledge.
- Market research may be conducted with consumers and/or with “influencers” or trade to determine if the addition of the variety promotes or deters from a “quality” perception. Varieties with significant negative perceptions will not be added to the VQA list until success in the premium wine category can be demonstrated.
- Proponents should provide a detailed rationale on why this new variety is expected to produce high quality wines in the conditions present in Ontario appellations.

## **3. Inter-specific crosses (hybrids)**

Evaluation of requests to add existing or new inter-specific crosses between vinifera and other grape species will normally require the following information as part of an application.

- Detailed records of parentage and breeding history
- Proof of 0% labrusca parentage (Labrusca grapes are not permitted for commercial wine production in Ontario)
- A legally acceptable name that has been introduced and peer reviewed through recognized horticultural journals and is published in a recognized compendium for named varieties of horticultural crops
- Wines resulting from at least 2 vintages of production in Ontario

- A detailed rationale on why this new variety is expected to produce high quality wines in the conditions present in Ontario appellations

Process/ Criteria guidelines:

- A formal request must be received and the applicant should provide as much information as possible
- VQAO will verify parentage and other information as necessary.
- The quality of at least 2 wines (2 vintages) will be assessed by a standard chemical analysis and a series of taste panels. Tastings might include the VQA Ontario Standards Development Committee, one or more of the regular VQA tasting panels, an independent panel (from a sommelier guild or academic institution) or other panel that does not include direct participation from competitor wineries. A positive consensus across several panels is sought that supports the conclusion that the overall quality of wines made from the grape is consistently good with appropriate winemaking skills and knowledge.
- Market research may be conducted with consumers and/or with “influencers” or trade to determine if the addition of the variety promotes or deters from a “quality” perception. Varieties with significant negative perceptions will not be added to the VQA list until success in the premium wine category can be demonstrated.