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Spain and France Unite for Resilient Viticulture: VITRES Project Launched

New Research Project Explores Innovative Grafting and Pruning Techniques for Vineyards

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On April 23, at the headquarters of the Chamber of Agriculture of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques in Pau, France, the inaugural meeting of the cross-border project "Resilient Viticulture in the POCTEFA Territory" (VITRES) took place. This ambitious initiative aims to enhance the production processes of vine plants through design and management practices that improve both productive efficiency and vineyard sustainability. VITRES fosters collaboration among universities, research centers, and companies, facilitating the transfer of research and development results to the wine sector.

The project involves seven public and private institutions from both sides of the Pyrenees. It has a budget of 1.78 million euros, 65% of which is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Interreg VI-A Spain-France-Andorra (POCTEFA 2021-2027) program. The project is set to last for 36 months. POCTEFA aims to strengthen economic and social integration in the border area between Spain, France, and Andorra, focusing on the development of economic, social, and environmental activities through joint strategies that promote sustainable territorial development.

The consortium includes the Public University of Navarre (Spain), the National Institute for Agriculture, Food, and Environment Research (Bordeaux, France), the Chamber of Agriculture of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques (France), Vitis Navarra SAT (Spain), the Chamber of Agriculture of the Pyrénées-Orientales (France), Viticultura Viva SL (Spain), and the Spanish National Research Council (Spain).

During the initial two-day meeting, the partners outlined the project's framework, defined roles, and set objectives for the coming years. Discussions centered on innovative strategies for grafting and pruning vineyards, crucial for promoting resilience and sustainability in vineyard management. Gonzaga Santesteban García, a professor in the Department of Agronomy, Biotechnology, and Food at the Public University of Navarre (UPNA) and project coordinator, emphasized the importance of VITRES in advancing knowledge and commitment to sustainable cultivation practices, tailored to meet current and future vineyard demands.

Throughout the project, the partners will engage in various activities, such as conducting multidisciplinary trials, producing scientific-technical publications and multimedia materials, and organizing seminars open to the wine sector on both sides of the Pyrenees. These initiatives are designed to share knowledge and best practices, fostering a more resilient and sustainable approach to viticulture.

The project's focus on innovative grafting and pruning techniques reflects a broader commitment to improving vine health and productivity. Grafting, which involves joining two plant segments to grow as one, is crucial for creating vines that are more resistant to diseases and pests. By selecting rootstocks and scions that are well-suited to specific environmental conditions, viticulturists can enhance the resilience of their vineyards. Pruning, on the other hand, is essential for controlling vine growth and ensuring optimal fruit production. Effective pruning practices can help manage vine vigor, improve air circulation, and reduce the risk of disease.

The VITRES project is particularly significant given the growing challenges faced by the wine industry, including climate change, soil degradation, and increasing pest and disease pressures. By developing and implementing sustainable vineyard management practices, the project aims to create a more resilient wine sector that can adapt to these challenges and continue to thrive.

Moreover, the project underscores the importance of cross-border cooperation in addressing shared challenges. By bringing together institutions and experts from Spain and France, VITRES facilitates the exchange of knowledge and expertise, fostering a collaborative approach to problem-solving. This cooperative model is essential for tackling complex issues that transcend national borders and require a coordinated response.

In addition to its technical and scientific contributions, VITRES also has a strong educational and outreach component. The project partners will organize seminars and workshops to disseminate their findings and share best practices with the broader wine community. These events will provide valuable opportunities for viticulturists, researchers, and industry professionals to learn from one another and explore new approaches to sustainable vineyard management.

As the VITRES project progresses, it will serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges. By demonstrating the benefits of sustainable viticulture practices and cross-border collaboration, the project can inspire other initiatives aimed at enhancing the resilience and sustainability of the wine sector.

In conclusion, the VITRES project represents a significant step forward in the quest for more resilient and sustainable viticulture. Through its focus on innovative grafting and pruning techniques, cross-border cooperation, and knowledge dissemination, the project aims to create a wine sector that is better equipped to face the challenges of the future. As the project unfolds, it will undoubtedly provide valuable insights and contributions that will benefit the wine industry and beyond.