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# National Grape Research Alliance Unveils 2026 Strategy to Boost U.S. Grape Industry Innovation

New plan launches major research initiatives and targets $1 million in annual funding to address climate and labor challenges

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The National Grape Research Alliance (NGRA) has launched its 2026 national research and funding strategy, introducing a new development model and three major research initiatives aimed at strengthening grape production across the United States. The

announcement was made following the organization’s first board meeting of the year, held on January 26 in Sacramento, California.

NGRA is recognized as the only national organization that coordinates research priorities for all grape sectors, including wine, juice, table grapes, and raisins. Its new strategy focuses on building long-term sustainability, resilience, and competitiveness for the U.S. grape and wine industry through coordinated scientific investment and collaboration between industry, academia, and government.

A key component of NGRA’s 2026 plan is the launch of an expanded development function. Approved by the Board of Directors in January, this initiative will operate year-round to secure diversified funding and strategic partnerships. The goal is to reach $1 million in annual funding by 2028. This approach responds to evolving research funding landscapes and increasing economic and environmental pressures faced by grape growers nationwide. NGRA aims to engage federal agencies, private foundations, industry partners, philanthropic organizations, and allied groups to strengthen the national funding ecosystem supporting viticulture research.

Donnell Brown, president of NGRA, emphasized the organization’s unique position in connecting stakeholders across sectors. She stated that the new development strategy highlights the broad impact of grape research on climate resilience, food security, and rural economies—areas increasingly valued by philanthropic organizations. Brown also noted that raising awareness among industry stakeholders is crucial as many challenges facing grape growers can be addressed through scientific solutions.

In 2026, NGRA will begin planning three major research initiatives focused on vineyard resilience, automation, and climate adaptation. Each project will be organized through in-person meetings to ensure national coordination and clear objectives for funding and commercial implementation.

The first initiative, VitisGEM (Genetics x Environment x Management), led by Dr. Maddy Oravec and Dr. Katie Gold at Cornell University, will study how genetics, environment, and management practices interact to influence grapevine traits. This project builds on previous NGRA-supported work and aims to help growers adopt improved varieties suited to diverse production environments.

The second initiative targets robotic pruning technology. Led by Dr. Terry Bates at Cornell University, this project seeks to develop automated systems that replicate human pruning after mechanical pre-pruning or hedging. The goal is to improve labor efficiency and consistency while reducing costs through advanced automation.

The third initiative focuses on developing drought- and salinity-tolerant rootstocks. Led by Dr. Luis Diaz-Garcia at UC Davis, this project will use high-throughput phenotyping and genomic tools to accelerate breeding of rootstocks suited for increasingly arid conditions in western grape-growing regions.

Tim Rinehart from USDA's Agricultural Research Service attended NGRA's January board meeting and expressed support for these projects. He noted that NGRA's approach aligns with USDA's own research priorities by combining genomics, precision technology, and risk reduction to ensure long-term productivity in the American grape industry.

NGRA also continues its leadership in extension services by supporting viticulture and enology professionals nationwide. In November 2025, NGRA co-hosted a workshop with UC Davis focused on advances in grape breeding and biotechnology. Two major events are planned for 2026: the National Viticulture and Enology Extension Leadership Community (NVEELC) Conference in San Antonio from April 20–22, hosted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension; and the ASEV-NGRA Vineyard Nutrition Symposium on June 16 in Boise, Idaho. The latter event will present findings from the HiRes Vineyard Nutrition project with participation from leading universities.

To further support the industry, NGRA maintains a public database tracking federally, state-, and regionally funded grape research projects. In 2025 alone, 144 projects received funding—a testament to the breadth of scientific investment coordinated by NGRA. The organization also offers an online directory of extension professionals across the country and publishes a widely read monthly newsletter covering grape research news.

Founded in 2005 as a nonprofit membership organization, NGRA has helped secure $65 million in funding for scientific solutions addressing challenges faced by all sectors of the American grape industry. More information about their programs can be found at

grapereseach.org.