

# Wine group: Keep the federal grants coming

Federal farm bill discussions could affect Idaho specialty crops in coming years.

**BY ZACH KYLE**

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While Congress decides how many billions of dollars to guarantee to food stamps, agricultural subsidies and other programs covered by farm bill proposals, one little guy — the Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission — hopes federal dollars keep rolling its way.

The commission announced this month that it will receive a grant of more

than \$40,000 for the second straight year to promote and advertise the Idaho wine industry. That money is a carryover from the last farm bill, but the commission — and thousands of organizations stumping for similar special crop grants nationwide — are watching the ongoing farm bill negotiations with keen eyes.

The Senate passed a \$500 billion bill that would span five years, and the House will soon vote on its version. Once bills are passed, a

committee made of members from both houses will consolidate the bills into a single piece of legislation.

The latest grant means a lot to Idaho Wine Commission President Moya Shatz Dolsby as she tries to maintain momentum for her growing industry. The grant paid for two billboards on Interstate 84 last year as well as street banners in Downtown Boise and trips to wine events in Seattle and Portland.

The grant money is “pret-



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The juice pressed from Merlot grapes drips from a large commercial crusher during the 2011 harvest near Marsing. The raw grape juice is used for regular Merlot and rose wine.

ty darn important,” Dolsby says. “We have a limited budget of about \$300,000 a year, and that includes salaries. The grant is a big chunk that pays for the majority of our advertising efforts.”

The wine grant is part of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Ten such grants were distributed to Idaho organizations, corporations and research institutions this month as part of the 2013 grants, which totaled more than \$892,000.

More than \$3.5 million in specialty crop grants have been awarded to 48 Idaho organizations since 2009, according to the Idaho Department of Agriculture.

The 2013 grant cycle was

kind to Idaho wine. The Sunnyslope Wine Trail Group received a grant for \$30,000 to market wineries in the Sunnyslope area between Caldwell and Marsing. And the U.S. Department of Agriculture received nearly \$94,000 to study the impact of grapevine viruses on Idaho grape quality.

The continuation of the wine commission’s grant will help place Idaho on a list of destinations for wine tourists, Dolsby says. She’s taking more phone calls from journalists interested in visiting Idaho wineries.

“We want to continue the momentum we’ve started,” she says. The grant “gives us funds to take out more ads

and spread the word about what we’re doing here.”

The University of Idaho received the state’s largest specialty crop block grant: more than \$155,000 to study eradicating necrotic isolates from Idaho potatoes.

The Idaho Bean Commission received a \$122,000 grant for trials of Peruvian dry bean seeds in the U.S. and Mexico. It also received a \$13,000 grant for slow-release nitrogen trials for dry bean production.

The Idaho Apple Commission, Idaho Preferred and the Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association also received grants.

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