

23rd September 2016



Volcani Grape Breeding Programme – Open Field Day report

The much anticipated open field day for the Volcani grape breeding project was held in Greece last week at the spectacular setting of the Fassoulis Vine Nursery in Nemea.

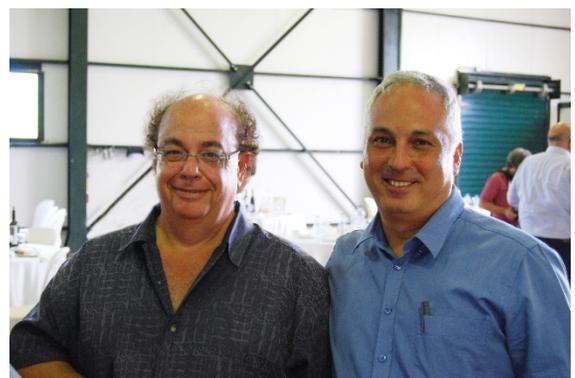
The fields were opened to growers from across the world, excited to see the progress of this respected variety development programme, led by the renowned expert, Dr Avi Perl.

Fresca Group is a core investor in the project and has begun commercial marketing of the new varieties to growers. Dimitrios Spanos is the Source Manager for Mack in Greece, and it was Dimitrios who led the field tour and evaluation of the new varieties.

Dr Perl and the team from Volcani were on hand to discuss each of the 30 varieties seen, along with the other global project partners such as the team from Hoekstra in South Africa. They were able to offer crucial feedback about how the same varieties are performing in the different climates and soils around the world.

The Volcani breeding programme has key differences to most other programmes operating today. The new varieties are made available to growers with no marketing restrictions. Given that the project partners also include growers from around the world, the variety characteristics also reflect the priorities sought in field performance too. Each new option has been tested against a low input production and protocol model. In short, the programme is seeking varieties that need less water, less fungicide, less fertiliser, less pesticide and less labour, but without any compromise to key attributes like flavour, crunch, brix, shape and yield.

The team has worked particularly hard to seek alternative varieties for growers to improve where there are currently weaker varieties and to extend seasons. Better quality crops, available for a longer period is the ultimate goal. There are acclaimed early grape varieties of all three colours in the programme which are performing particularly well in the field trials and which are now ready for commercial production.



Dr Avi Perl with Jacob Mualem

In addition to the variety evaluation and field day, as part of the commitment to more sustainable farming techniques, the visiting growers were also able to hear more about the new technology available from Electrostatic Spraying Systems. A practical demonstration in the vineyard showed the particular effectiveness of their sprayheads, combined with a presentation about the potential for practical application in farm settings.

Speaking after the event, Dimitrios Spanos reflected on the success of the trip: “With any varietal development programme, it usually takes years for even a hint of a commercial success. We have always been realistic about this, but the results of this programme have easily surpassed our expectations. I was expecting us to have perhaps one variety ready for wider sale at this stage, but there are four or five superb varieties that we will begin to see planted commercially shortly. I have been greatly encouraged by the feedback from growers at our open field day this week, and I look forward to working with attendees to progress the roll-out of our successful selections.”

He continued by praising the work of the Volcani Institute and Dr Avi Perl. “The team at ARO/Volcani have worked with such passion and such detail, and remained true to the original project vision. From the laboratory to meticulous field practice and exhaustive protocol testing, Dr Perl has directed a world-leading team. Their work continues as we strive to improve the varieties we have so far and as new material becomes available.”

Our particular thanks must go to Fassoulis Vine Nursery for their generous hospitality and time, and to Greek grape business Pegasus for allowing us to visit their production facilities too.

Key facts:

Project start : 2010 (Season 6 today)

Partners : Volcani Institute
Fresca Group Ltd (Europe & North Africa)
Plant Genetics (RSA & Namibia)
Grupo Alta (Mexico)
Gesex (South America)

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