
Water Transport in Grape Berry and Pre-Harvest Berry Dehydration

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A thesis submitted to the University of Adelaide in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree

Master of Agricultural Science

February, 2013

Abstract

Pre-harvest berry dehydration is reported for different grape varieties in many countries and may be exacerbated by global warming. In Australia a net water loss of up to 30% from berries of the most commonly grown red grape variety *Vitis vinifera* L. cv. Shiraz at the end of ripening is a serious problem causing significant yield losses and higher sugar concentration. The current hypothesis is that this water loss occurs due to a diminishing water inflow into berries at the end of ripening while transpiration prevails. Water backflow from berries to the parent vine via the xylem may contribute to this loss. The approach in this study was to compare hydraulic properties and quantify water uptake and water loss in different varieties to identify the contributing factor(s) in berry water relations that may cause net water loss. Different patterns of hydraulic resistance for water inflow were detected in the rachis, pedicels, and berries in bunches of Chardonnay, Grenache, and Shiraz during berry development. An increase in whole bunch hydraulic conductance was correlated to berry growth in Grenache, but not in Chardonnay and Shiraz. At the end of ripening, berry hydraulic resistance decreased in Shiraz whilst it increased in Chardonnay. This may prevent water backflow from Chardonnay berries to the parent vine, but this difference appeared to occur after weight loss began in Shiraz, and in Grenache, which did not display weight loss, there was a low berry hydraulic resistance. A lower hydraulic resistance in bunches of Grenache corresponds to this variety having more isohydric regulation of plant water potential reported in the literature. Using an *in vitro* transpiration assay on excised berries where both water loss and water uptake were measured, berries of all varieties showed net water uptake in early stages of development switching to a net water loss after veraison. A twofold higher net water loss from mature berries of Shiraz compared to Chardonnay was caused by lower water uptake in Shiraz rather than a higher transpiration rate. I conclude that the difference may be caused by a lower water potential difference as driving force for water uptake into Shiraz berries, since an equal or higher hydraulic resistivity was measured in Chardonnay berries. Finally, a computer model was developed to simulate transpiration and water uptake in the field under changing evaporative conditions during the 2011-12 season. This model demonstrated that water uptake via the xylem and phloem was able to balance peaks in transpiration due to high VPD events just after veraison, but was not able to compensate these peaks at the end of ripening. Compared to Grenache and Chardonnay there was greater sensitivity of Shiraz berries to high VPD at the end of ripening due to insufficient compensation of transpirational water loss by xylem water uptake which may explain this variety's propensity to display significant weight loss.

Declaration

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisors Prof. Steve Tyerman and Dr. Brent Kaiser for their guidance, encouragement, and support throughout my Master studies. In particular, thank you, Steve, for all the interesting discussions, excellent ideas, the support to attend meetings, workshops, and conferences, and your great trust to give me the freedom to try whatever experiment seemed to be interesting. I'm looking very much forward to have you as a supervisor for my proposed PhD. Moreover, I would also like to thank Dr. Joanne Tilbrook for her external supervision and for sharing her knowledge about her previous experiments on grape berry water relations with me.

Special thanks go to Wendy Sullivan for her great support in the glasshouse and laboratory. Wendy has a fantastic way to keep everything running and helped me a lot in setting up instruments, growing my plants, and obtaining materials for my research.

I also wish to thank all members of the Tyerman, Gilliham, and Kaiser Laboratory for the fabulous two years that I had in this group so far.

For their financial support, I would like to acknowledge the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for providing me with a living allowance and for covering part of my tuition fees. Moreover, I would like to thank the Gerlacianum foundation for a top-up scholarship, Yalumba and the Australian Society of Viticulture and Oenology for scholarships to attend symposia in Australia and overseas, and The University of Sydney to support my attendance at a workshop.

My greatest gratitude goes to my family, my girlfriend, and friends. Thank you Mum, Dad, Christoph, Daniel, and Grandma for all your support and the wonderful Skype meetings which make me feel closer to you. You are the best family anyone could have. Thanks you, Lina, for your love, your patience, and support during my writing process. Home Is With You.

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