

Assigning the “Correct” Grape Variety Name

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FPS HAS RECEIVED MANY REQUESTS OVER THE YEARS to “fix” all of the names of the FPS grape selections. This is an understandable request, given all the problems mis-identified grape materials can cause nurseries, grape growers and winemakers. In fact, we have been working diligently to assign the most accurate names to FPS grape materials using all the resources available. However, the process is not as straightforward as one would hope. Fundamental shifts in grape variety naming philosophy have occurred because the industry is becoming more global. Assigning “correct” names to grape materials is a little like aiming at a moving target as the amount of variety ID data expands and the reasons for choosing specific synonyms change.

ID Data

Our confidence in grape identification is often a matter of degree based on several kinds of information. Visual inspection of the vines by an ampelographer (grape variety expert) is the oldest method. The credentials of the ampelographer and their range of expertise are important to consider when using their reports. For example, the opinion of an Italian ampelographer would be considered more authoritative than a French ampelographer if the name of an Italian variety is being discussed. In general, contemporary ampelographers reporting on FPS materials have been very humble and have shown great sensitivity to the complexities of this work. The ampelographers themselves are the first to qualify their opinions when they are unsure of the identity of a vine, and recommend that we consult with someone more familiar with the variety in question. FPS foundation mother vines are often inspected multiple times by more than one ampelographer. Each comment regarding a vine’s identity is logged into the FPS database. The more reports that agree, the higher our confidence in the conclusion.

Source documentation is another way to get an idea of how accurately a selection is named. Selections from unknown sources or from sources with incomplete records (such as selections from the Jackson Vineyard) tend to be misidentified more often. Materials that originate from well-established reputable sources usually come labeled with the correct variety name.

DNA analysis is an extremely useful new tool for variety identification. Advantages of the DNA technique include the ability to store DNA profiles for hundreds of local varieties in a database and share DNA variety profiles internationally. DNA profiles from vines of unknown identity can be compared to many references to search for a meaningful match. DNA analysis can also be used to compare vines with the same name from several different sources. If they match, the profile can be used as a reference with a fairly high degree of confidence (again, the more sources that match, the higher the confidence).

Choosing Between Synonyms

Sometimes records, ampelographers, and/or DNA testing results suggest more than one name that could be considered correct. In these cases other factors must be considered when selecting a name.

When customers pay FPS to import a selection, the name preferred by the customer is used when more than one name is correct. For example, the French names Cot and Nielluccio are used to identify ENTAV INRA® clones of those varieties instead of Malbec and Sangiovese because Cot and Nielluccio are preferred by this FPS client, and all four names are well documented and correct.

We usually keep the names that are assigned to selections when they are imported/collected if the names are correct synonyms. For example, we use the name “Shiraz” to identify a selection of Syrah that came to FPS from Australia labeled “Shiraz”. DNA tests have shown that Shiraz and Syrah are the same variety, but Shiraz is the name used in Australia and has achieved its own recognition in the wine trade. Since we also use the name Syrah to identify selections of this variety that came from France, both names appear on the list of registered grape selections available from FPS.

At FPS, when more than one name is correct but one name is more informative, the more informative name is used. For instance, we use “Durif (Petite Sirah) FPS 03” to identify a registered FPS selection that was originally called Petite Sirah in California. DNA evidence has shown that the name Petite Sirah is associated with three completely different varieties (Durif, Petite Sirah

and Peloursin) so it is not an exact name designation. We therefore use Durif as the prime name and show Petite Sirah as a synonym.

Some grape names are unique to California such as Early Burgundy, Grey Riesling, Napa Gamay, Sauvignon vert, and White Riesling. We continue to use these names or recognize them as synonyms at FPS because there is a long tradition of wines with these names being produced in California. However, if these names are phased out of the California wine industry, they will gradually disappear from our lists as well.

Names approved by the TTB

Wine grape names must be coordinated with the Federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) because the TTB dictates the names approved for use on USA wine labels. A new list of names approved for use by the TTB is on the web at: <http://www.ttb.gov/alcohol/info/faq/wine.htm> (scroll down to question “W9: What grape names are approved as type designations for American wines?”). All of the names on the “approved” and “approved pending formal rulemaking” lists may be used as of 7/21/05. Updated lists of approved grape names will be more formally published

in the Federal Regulations within the next year. Names that appear on the approved list for the first time include: Biancolella, Erbaluce, Forastera, Lagrein, Montepulciano, Negro Amaro, Nero d’Avola, Peloursin, and Rondinella.

Due to the success of the FPS grape importation program, many new wine grape varieties have recently moved or will soon be moving into commercial production. Until now, new names have been submitted to the TTB for approval on an individual basis by wineries. We propose to work closely with TTB and initiate a policy of regular review of FPS Registered selections for possible approval of new variety names for wine labels. Variety names we plan to submit for TTB approval next year include: Cilieggiolo, Cot, Greco di Tufo, Grenache noir, Moscato Giallo and Nielluccio. Others interested in adding new names to the approved list may contact the Regulations and Rulings Division at (202) 927-8210 for information about the process.

Name changes made at FPS over last 6 years


A list of all the name changes made by FPS over the last 6 years is shown in Table 1 along with the reason the names were changed. 

Table 1: Grape names changed at FPS 1997-2005

Original name used at FPS	New name assigned	Year changed	Reason for change
Cabernet Franc 02	Carmenere FPS 01	1997	original ID was wrong
Sauvignon Musque S1f	Sauvignon blanc (musque) FPS 27	2002	DNA matched Sauvignon blanc
Grenache FPS 01A	Grenache noir FPS 01A	2002	to distinguish Grenache noir from red and grey forms of Grenache
Grenache FPS 03	Grenache noir FPS 03	2002	
Grenache FPS 04	Grenache noir FPS 04	2002	
Touriga FPS 01	Touriga Nacional FPS 03	2002	more accurate ID for selection
Touriga FPS 02	Touriga Nacional FPS 02	2002	more accurate ID for selection
Alvarelhao FPS 02	Touriga Nacional FPS 04	2002	original ID was wrong
Roussane	Viognier FPS 02	2002	original ID was wrong
Roussane	Viognier FPS 03	2002	original ID was wrong
Roussane	Viognier FPS 04	2002	original ID was wrong
Black Malvoisie FPS 02	Cinsaut FPS 02	2003	Cinsaut is better recognized internationally & is the TTB approved prime name
Bastardo FPS 01	Trousseau FPS 10	2003	Trousseau is better recognized internationally and Bastardo was phased out by the TTB

Original name used at FPS	New name assigned	Year changed	Reason for change
French Colombard FPS 01	Colombard FPS 01	2003	Colombard is better recognized internationally & is the TTB approved prime name
French Colombard FPS 03	Colombard FPS 03	2003	
Gray Riesling FPS 01	Trousseau gris FPS 01	2003	TTB is phasing out the name Grey Riesling
Gray Riesling FPS 02	Trousseau gris FPS 02	2003	
Gray Riesling FPS 03	Trousseau gris FPS 03	2003	
Gray Riesling FPS 04	Trousseau gris FPS 04	2003	
Gray Riesling FPS 05	Trousseau gris FPS 05	2003	
Grignolino FPS 02	Arneis FPS 03	2003	original ID was wrong
Malvasia Nera FPS 01	Tempranillo FPS 07	2003	original ID was wrong
Mataro FPS 01	Mourvedre FPS 04	2003	Mourvedre is better recognized internationally & is the prime name approved by the TTB
Mataro FPS 03	Mourvedre FPS 03	2003	
Napa Gamay FPS 01	Valdiguie FPS 04	2003	Valdiguie is better recognized internationally & is the prime name approved by the TTB
Napa Gamay FPS 02	Valdiguie FPS 02	2003	
Napa Gamay FPS 03	Valdiguie FPS 03	2003	
Pinot Saint George FPS 01	Negrette FPS 06	2003	Negrette is better recognized internationally & is the TTB approved prime name
Pinot Saint George FPS 02	Negrette FPS 02	2003	
Pinot Saint George FPS 04	Negrette FPS 04	2003	
Pinot Saint George FPS 05	Negrette FPS 05	2003	
Petite Sirah FPS 03	Durif FPS 03	2003	Durif identifies this selection more accurately
White Riesling FPS 02	Riesling FPS 17	2003	Riesling is better recognized internationally & is the TTB approved prime name
White Riesling FPS 04	Riesling FPS 04	2003	
White Riesling FPS 09	Riesling FPS 09	2003	
White Riesling FPS 10	Riesling FPS 10	2003	
White Riesling FPS 12	Riesling FPS 12	2003	
White Riesling FPS 16	Riesling FPS 16	2003	
Nebbiolo Fino FPS 02	Nebbiolo FPS 09	2004	Simplify name because ID is the same by DNA & Nebbiolo is name approved by TTB
Nebbiolo Lampia FPS 01	Nebbiolo FPS 10	2004	
Nebbiolo Michet FPS S1	Nebbiolo FPS <# not yet assigned>	2004	
Riesling Italico FPS 02	Riesling FPS 18	2004	original ID was wrong
Riesling Italico FPS 03	Riesling FPS 19	2004	original ID was wrong
Refosco FPS 02	Mondeuse FPS 01	2005	original ID was wrong
Oppenheim #4 FPS 17	Teleki 5C FPS 11	2005	original ID was wrong