

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Amanda Brack

509-782-8234

amanda@wawgg.org

LATINAS FILL CLASSROOM IN GRAPE EDUCATION PROGRAM

For the first time in program history the Latino Ag Education Program (LAEP) saw significant female participation. Since its inception, the wine grape industry noticed that female employees were not taking full advantage of LAEP. Wenatchee Valley College (WVC) and WAWGG responded to these concerns by facilitating the development of an all women class to encourage more attendance by women.

Another year of WVC's LAEP, sponsored by the Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers (WAWGG) and Yakima Valley Community College, kicked off on November 6, 2015 with over 40 students, more than half were women. For the 2015-2016 school year, LAEP offered both Level 1 and Level 2 classes designed for Latino employees in management or supervisory roles in the field of viticulture.

Francisco Sarmiento and Professor Leo Garcia, faculty at WVC, teach the courses. Sarmiento and Garcia's cultural, employment, and educational background as well as Spanish fluency allow them to uniquely relate to, serve, and instruct LAEP students.

LAEP is modeled after the Hispanic Orchard Employees Education Program (HOEPP) at WVC, started by Garcia. HOEPP provides instruction on relevant science and technology, applicable English and math, everyday life situations, supervisory skills, and basic computer skills. After seeing the success of HOEPP, WAWGG expressed a desire to work with Garcia to adapt and implement the program to meet the educational needs of wine grower's employees. The first LAEP class began in the fall of 2007 and since then LAEP has served over 300 industry employees.

The Level 1 class is taught in Spanish and emphasizes technical English viticulture terminology. The curriculum introduces students to the "whys" of the many production and management practices of wine grapes. The Level 2 class builds on Level 1 utilizing a systems approach of how the industry fits together and how quality starts in the vineyard.

One student said, "It gave me the opportunity to learn and share my knowledge with others around me. I learned so many new things about my job...now, I value my job." Another commented, "I appreciate what I learned in class because I needed that information to be able to teach my crew members and be a better supervisor."

WAWGG Board Member Julia Kock said, "LAEP classes are the most meaningful benefit I can provide to my employees. Vineyard work is skilled labor. Educated employees understand why their job is important and are focused on high quality results."

The goal of LAEP is to enhance professional skills, increase self-confidence, and provide for individual advancement and success within the Latino workforce in the wine grape industry.

In 2016-2017, LAEP will offer a women's only Level 2 course and a Level 3 course open to men and women.

###

The Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers serves as the synergistic leader and unifying voice – through advocacy and education – for growers, vintners, partners, and policy makers.