



The Grapevine

Newsletter of the Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains

April, 2006

VINE TALK

Bud break. Well, I think it is anyway. It looks like we may be running 2-3 weeks behind last year. The Chardonnay was first out this year. Last year the Pinot broke first. Most vineyards that I have seen are no more than a couple of inches long at best. By the time you read this they will have grown more, especially if we get any warm weather.

The biggest challenge of this year is by far the rain. The ultra wet conditions of the season so far have made it difficult to even access many vineyards, much less spray them only to have the spray instantly washed off by the next storm. A sound fall cover crop program should pay off big this spring by allowing you into sites that otherwise might be inaccessible for a few extra weeks. It is not a perfect system but cover crops have improved access in many vineyards.

Spray program. Hopefully many of you were able to get a dormant spray of lime sulfur on in the warm part of February. Still, this will not cover you if you can't get in and spray now. Larry Bettiga will join us at our meeting in late April and will speak directly about the spray program for this year.

Hopefully you may be able to get in and spray before the meeting. I like using early season spray eradicants like JMS Stylet oil early and often in a year like this. You can do the same thing with a more traditional sulfur program, especially if this has worked for you in the past and you do not have mildew pressure in your vineyard. Whatever program you decide to go with, it is essential to focus on a complete tank mix (no material falling out on the bottom of the tank), thorough coverage, and follow up sprays after rainstorms and significant green growth.

Next Meetings

April 27, 3:00pm: Next VASCM Meeting "Spraying to Beat the Rain"

*at Alfaro Family Vineyards, Corralitos
(directions on last page)*

1:30: Walking tour of the vineyard with Richard Alfaro. 1+miles including hills. Come prepared for a long walk in the vineyard. Meet at the winery.

3:00: Presentation by Larry Bettiga, UC Extension Farm Advisor and Viticultural Specialist:
The Mechanism of Mildew and Spray Options

Please note: The topic of this meeting has been changed because of the continued rain and early mildew pressure. We will schedule the meeting on organic growing in a few months.

- Business meeting/elections
- Wine tasting – please bring two bottles: one for the meeting and one as a donation to people who help us out (speakers, logo design, video)

Late May/early June: "Energy Efficiency Workshop" *To be finalized. We are working with the Sustainability Alliance to bring this workshop to the Santa Cruz Mts., and the PG&E rebates and cost savings available for vineyards and wineries.*

... And Events

Pinot Days: June 23-25, San Francisco

(Grand Tasting on Sunday, featuring a number of Santa Cruz Mountains wineries). For more information: www.pinotdays.com.

Canopy management will be key to disease control this year. Expect to go into many vineyards to disbud or clear out the canopy more than once. Light and air are the best weapons of defense against disease pressure.

(Continued next page)

(Vine Talk, continued from first page)

Keep your canopies open and in a position to dry out as quickly as possible.

Fruit set may be problematic this year. I have read some articles that suggest a few options that may increase your odds of a decent crop. Nothing can change the weather, this year or last, and that will be the prime determinate of your crop.

Still, if you want to try something, you may consider the following strategy: Be sure to include Zinc and Boron in your pre-bloom sprays. Be careful not to overdo the Boron but many vineyards in this area are very low in this micronutrient and deficiencies in the two can dramatically affect fruit set and cluster formation. There are many Zinc formulations. I prefer the chelated liquid formulations but many people think it doesn't matter as long as you get it in the tank. The most common form of Boron available is Sol-u-bor. This is a great product that dissolves easily. The only problem is that it comes in 50 lb. bags and you only need maybe a pound or less per acre. If you have a small vineyard consider sharing a bag of this with a neighbor to reduce storage hassles. (Note: you can send a message to the VASCM email list, to VASCM@kkn.net, to see if anyone else would be interested to share a bag.) Other micronutrients have been shown to affect berry set, fruit formation, and fruit maturity so consult your petiole analysis to see if your vines are showing deficiencies. If you didn't do a petiole analysis last year try to get it done this year for sure.

Remember the **vineyard floor**. Keep the weeds away from the vine trunks, especially around young vines. Ideally mow the vineyard rows, and cultivate if you must. Just keep the non-vine growth down.

Watch for gophers. The little buggers have up to 3 or more generations a year. Get the 1st generation under control now (easier when the earth is damp and soft) and your problems will be less for the rest of the year.

Be sure and pick up some Vine Mealybug traps at our next meeting. We will have them available and want to encourage everybody to monitor for this pest. Ignorance is not bliss in this case. Stay vigilant and be proactive. (You can find detailed information on VMBs and the damage they cause on our website at www.vascm.org.)

The good news is that there is some real and very positive interest in our Santa Cruz Mountain fruit. Congratulations to everyone for their hard work and focus on producing the premium crops that make our wines valued and memorable.

Happy Spring (it really is Spring). We will see you out there in the canopies letting in that light and air.

Prudy Foxx

President, Viticulture Assn.
of the Santa Cruz Mountains



Mealybug Traps from the Ag Commissioner Free at April Meeting

Juan Hidalgo from the Santa Cruz Agricultural Commissioner's Office will distribute Vine Mealybug traps *free* at the April meeting. He will return to subsequent meetings to collect traps and distribute new ones. Traps should be changed every 6-8 weeks. This makes it real easy to get and use VMB traps and get them analyzed – and at no cost!

Are You Losing Tons of Topsoil?

15 to 20 tons of soil per acre is lost due to erosion before your eye can even see it. That is stunning. And that is topsoil, the richest dirt in your vineyard, the stuff you want to stay put. This is one of the valuable insights provided by Rich Casale, from the NRCS' Santa Cruz office, at the Ecosystems Management workshop we held in March.

Here are a few notes from his presentation:

- It is not only steep slopes that are susceptible to erosion (through the speed of water runoff), but also long slopes even if they are shallower, through water accumulation.
- Extend cover crops beyond the ends of your rows into the surrounding area to help hold the soil in place.
- Access roads contribute to erosion – consider seeding your roads to reduce runoff.
- Out-slope your benches – in-sloped benches collect runoff along the rows.
- Avoid cutting into a slope – it creates instability and requires continued maintenance.

- Consider mulching with hay. Pull the bales apart and spread the hay on the ground in a thin layer over groundcover seed.
- Use jutenet to hold mulch and seed in place; it's not effective by itself to hold soil.
- Seed drainage ditches with grass. Don't dump 'filler' into ditches (i.e. rocks) – it creates obstructions that increase erosion.
- Leave a buffer zone or filter strip at least 50' wide between vine rows and a riparian/stream environment to avoid erosion of stream banks.
- Revegetate stream banks.
- Remove invasive, non-native plants (like broom, etc.) and replant with natives. It is better to start with a small plant and water as little as possible to force its roots into the ground.

Funding Available

The NRCS has funding dollars available for various programs, including:

- **Wildlife Habitats Incentive Program:** a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. Through WHIP the NRCS provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program:** a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

Resources:

Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District (<http://www.sccrcd.org>): provides information on the NRCS and the funding programs above; includes a detailed soils map for Santa Cruz County, and links to NRCS soils information in general.

NRCS representatives are available as free consultants (your tax dollars are paying for their valuable services) to advise you on watershed and erosion issues and solutions.

In Santa Cruz County: 831-475-1967
(Rich Casale)

In San Mateo County: 650-726-4660

In Santa Clara County: 831-637-4360

Sustainability Results for the Santa Cruz Mountains

The Sustainable Winegrowing Program presented a summary of the results from the Santa Cruz Mountains at the March 23 Ecosystem Management Workshop. These overall results are based on the self-assessment forms submitted by those of you who have done the workbook.

It appears that the Santa Cruz Mts. region is not very different from the statewide total, albeit a trifle lower overall. Some of our strengths are from the ecosystems chapters. For Chapter 6, Pest Management, our strengths are evidenced by growers choosing the least disruptive materials to use against vineyard pests and applying these materials in a targeted way. Improvements can be made in monitoring for vineyard pests, weeds and diseases, as well as training employees to identify pests. For Chapter 8, Ecosystem Management, the strengths were managing vineyards near riparian and aquatic ecosystems with environmental sensitivity, and the knowledge of community dynamics and energy flow within a vineyard ecosystem. The challenges from this chapter were defining the resource base, understanding the nutrient cycle, and using nest boxes for predatory birds (owls & raptors).

Thus far several self-assessment workshops have been hosted in the Santa Cruz Mountains with over 60 growers farming over 1,600 acres attending. Of these, self-assessment data was submitted by 228 acres from 24 vineyard enterprises. Statewide there have been over 90 workshops with 900+ growers representing nearly half of the 530,000 statewide winegrape acres with over 650 growers submitting data on 130,000 acres.

In addition, we have held workshops focusing on specific sustainability topics, namely on Integrated Pest Management (in 2005) and the Ecosystems Workshop this year, and are planning a workshop on Energy Efficiency to be held in the next couple of months.

If you have not yet done it, the self-assessment workshop is an opportunity for you to learn about the best practices implemented by other growers and wineries, the benefits of sustainability, and how you can apply them to improve your farming or winery operations. Workshop participants receive a free 500-page self-

(Sustainability Results, continued)

assessment workbook covering a broad range of operational topics including: soil management, pest management, ecosystems management, water and energy conservation, materials handling, human resources and community relations. The workbook serves as a valuable tool for you during the workshop to identify strengths and areas for improvement in your operations. An instructor from the Sustainability Alliance conducts the seminar. When you submit your results you receive back a customized, private report that compares your results to the region and state.

If you have not yet done the self-assessment workshop and would like to, please let Mary or Prudy know and we can arrange to have it held here again.

For more information on the program, you can go to www.sustainablewinegrowing.org.

About the Vine Mealybug – And Why We Need to Trap

The vine mealybug (VMB) is a relatively new species in California, but it has spread rapidly and it's coming our way. It has been found in vineyards in Monterey and Santa Clara Counties. The VMB has the potential to become one of our most important vineyard pests. This was the warning from Larry Bettiga, U.C. Farm Advisor, during our November Integrated Pest Management workshop at Cooper-Garrod.

Except for its lack of a tail, the VMB is difficult to distinguish from other, more common mealybugs. The VMB, however, is more difficult to control and causes greater damage. They can infest an entire vine, feeding on the grapes and under the bark, where sprays don't reach. They feed out further on the canopy than other mealybugs and produce more 'dew', which attracts black soot. They can invade the soil. Prolonged infestation can weaken vines, reduce vine growth, yields and quality of fruit, and increases the spread of viral diseases. Effective treatment for VMB requires expensive, prolonged chemical application that can disrupt sustainable integrated pest management programs.

VMB is spread by infested plants, birds, farm equipment, fruit, leaves, vineyard workers. But primarily it's been spread by nursery stock. Ask

your nursery what treatments (i.e. heat) they've done to prevent the spread of VMB.

The key to eradication is to identify the pest ASAP and treat promptly. Pheromone traps (one per 20 acres, available from Western Farm Service – or free from the Ag Commissioner at our meetings) are an essential identification tool, and should be in place by the end of March. They should be examined at least every two weeks. It is recommended that you trap if you've planted stock since 1998, or if your vineyard is adjacent to an infected site or has been visited by personnel from an infested site.

(Find more information on VMBs on our website at www.vascm.org, under the Vine Talk link.)

On the Website

Check out the features and information available on the website at <http://www.vascm.org>. It is a great resource!

- A list of all the vineyards in the appellation, including links to photos and websites
- Summaries and presentations from prior meetings
- Seasons in the vineyard: vineyard practices according to time of year
- List of vineyard resources, i.e. vineyard consultants, suppliers, etc.
- CAWG newsletters
- And more!

Thank you to our Webmaster, Ed Muns!

Now Is the Time to Use the Buy/Sell Exchange!!

If you are a grower looking for a home for your grapes in the Fall, or a winemaker wanting a source of fruit, now is the time to make the connections and secure your arrangements. Use VASCM's Buy/Sell Exchange, established as a mechanism for growers and wineries to connect for the purpose of buying and selling appellation grapes, as well as other wine industry related services and products.

To participate on the Exchange, send an email message to the list mailman at VASCM-owner@kkn.net. You can also view the Exchange listings on our website at www.VASCM.org.

**Directions to Alfaro Family Vineyards
496 Hames Road, Corralitos
831-728-5172**

From Hwy. 1: Take the Freedom Blvd. Exit
- Left at the first stop sign onto Corralitos Rd.
(which is several miles down Freedom Blvd.)
- Left on Hames Rd. at the next stop sign, just
past Corralitos Market
- Alfaro Family Vineyards is on the right at the
top of the hill after a little less than a mile

**Officers of the Viticulture Association of
the Santa Cruz Mountains:**

President: Prudy Foxx, 831-359-9100,
Prudyfoxx@aol.com

Treasurer: Lawrence Ives, Calabazas Creek
Research, 408-741-8680,
rlives@calcreek.com

Vice President/Program Chair/Newsletter:
Mary Lindsay, Muns Vineyard/Lindsay PR,
408-984-7242, mary@munsvineyard.com or
mary@lindsaypr.com

Membership

Membership in the VASCM is \$50 annually,
payable at the beginning of the calendar year.
Members must be winegrape growers (own or
manage a vineyard) in the Santa Cruz Mountains
appellation. We welcome friends of growers and
other professionals providing services to growers
to our meetings, but non-members are charged
\$15/meeting to attend.

Membership forms are available online at
<http://www.vascm.org>.

The Viticulture Association of the
Santa Cruz Mountains
P.O. Box 126
Saratoga, CA 95071

NEWSLETTER

**Next Meeting: April 27, 3:00pm
1:30 Vineyard Walking Tour
At Alfaro Family Vineyards, Corralitos**



"Mildew Control"

