

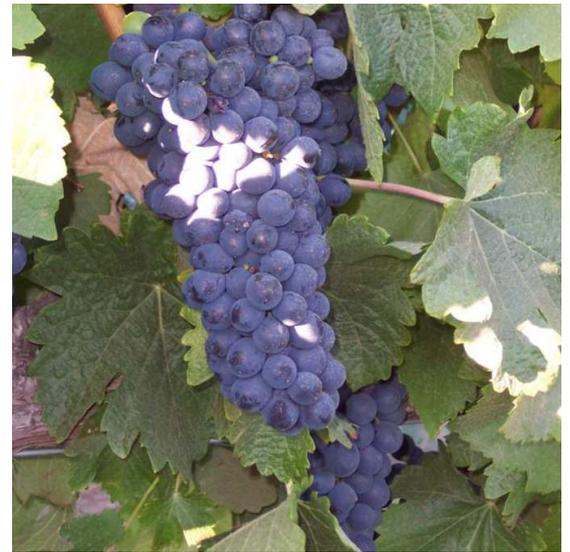


Viticulture Association
of the
Santa Cruz Mountains

Vine Talk. Harvest 2013.

Welcome to another outstanding vintage from the Santa Cruz Mountains as well as most of California. Mother Nature has so far delivered a near perfect season for the development of wine grapes destined for ultra premium wine production.

The dry winter emerged into a Spring full of even temperatures and little moisture. While of concern to the water table and soil profile surrounding the roots, the above ground climate provided ideal conditions for a near perfect set. This year more than most distinguished the symptoms of nutrient deficiency in the fruit clusters from weather related problems created at set in other years. If you noted symptoms like small and large berries on a single cluster or all small berries with no seed or an empty rachis with the berries all shattered off you are most likely witnessing the effects of micronutrient deficiency in your vineyard. These symptoms can also be caused by virus but we can pretty much eliminate the weather as a factor in 2013.



If you suspect the nutrient status of your vines may be off it is not too late to take petiole samples. Take the samples from the most recently matured leaf on canes in question. You will need 75 to 100 petioles (the stem between the leaf blade and the cane) to get a good sample for the lab to work with. Maintain them in a cool environment and transport or mail immediately to lab for delivery the next day. Perry Labs and Soil Control Lab, both in Watsonville, provide local analysis service. There are other reliable labs that require shipping. There are fewer standards to compare with this time of year but an ultra low number will signal an issue. The nitrogen readings are less reliable due to mobility but the other important elements will show a trend at least.

Most corrections to deficiencies will benefit the vines for next year and cannot be expected to resolve major issues this close to harvest. Do plan to immediately apply necessary amendments post harvest so that the vines can prepare for 2014.

Canopy management is the other big issue for this time of year. Any significant leaf removal or canopy adjustment should have been done immediately post set. That being said, it is still important to check your vineyards for overcrowded clusters and areas where leaves and canes completely obscure the light. As DeVinci said, "Wine is sunlight in a glass". While it is extremely important to protect grape skins (especially delicate varieties like Pinot Noir) from sunburn, it is of equal value to allow some light into the canopy and onto the clusters to allow for flavor development and proper fruit maturation. This will also enhance disease management. Airflow and stippled light within the canopy allows the clusters to dry out after morning dew or a fog event. You don't want dark hidden areas within the vines that never see the light of day. This is essential to protect against botrytis. This disease is the most common threat to the vines post veraison, especially in coastal or fog prone areas. Prolonged exposure to wet on an unprotected or unmanaged canopy can lead to a botrytis outbreak. The risk increases as the brix rise and the grape skins stretch thin.

If you see any indication of botrytis in the vineyard (gray fuzzy mold) it is important to aggressively separate clusters, step up canopy management (without overly exposing fruit) and possibly add another spray.

There are many effective sprays on the market, both organic and conventional. Actinovate, Regalia, Serenade, and Oxidate all can be effective organic options. All of these products have their limitations and all of them will need to be re-applied after any rain event. Oxidate can eliminate the good microorganisms within the canopy along with the bad guys so use with care.

Elevate is probably the best conventional spray as it has no pre harvest interval though I can't imagine spraying anything really close to harvest. Other options for prevention to be used prior to or immediately following threat of an outbreak include Scala, Vanguard and a host of others. Be sure to check re-entry and harvest intervals before applying. Avoid spraying any of these products close to the harvest date as they can potentially have a negative effect on fermentation.

Remember, in all things grape, prevention is the best cure. It is never as good to go back and fix a problem as it is to keep it from happening. Any botrytis or mildew in a vineyard will effect fruit and consequently wine quality not to mention ruin your peace of mind and negatively impact a beautiful summer day. Keep ahead of disease issues in your vineyard.

It is always a challenge for growers to recover their investment each year. It is no secret that this is an elusive endeavor. Value of the grapes is based on many factors including: quality of product, price per bottle, grower/producer relationship, ease of communication and transport, and payment schedule. Quality is key. Fruit in excellent condition with balanced nutrient status, with minimal disease/damage issues and no spray residue is much easier to work with on the winemaking side. This leads to wine with a higher probability of market success. Work with your winemaker to clarify fruit quality factors that influence fermentation.

Sharpen your harvest tools and wash the baskets and bins. The big days are upon us. Review last year's wines to see if you might make some harvest changes. Walk the rows with your winemaker. Taste the fruit. Every vineyard shows its own unique flavors and nothing compares to putting the fruit to your own lips.

Most of all enjoy this magical season when all the efforts of the year come together. The story is in the fruit. Enjoy it!

Buena suerte.

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