

Bud break 2011. Welcome to the new vintage! March made its traditional windy entrance bringing icy temperatures, lots of welcome rains and even a light dusting of soft fallen snow. Now the days are warming and buds are swelling as we speak.

Prepare for the upcoming season. If you noticed weak growth or experienced botrytis or powdery mildew pressure in 2010 get your spray schedule organized and a fertilization plan in place. Be prepared to apply spray immediately post bud break. I am a big believer in eradicant sprays early in the season. Whatever you choose, be sure to cover the entire vine, all along the cordon and the vine trunks. In high pressure areas and with more susceptible varieties like Chardonnay and Pinot Noir you will want to follow up with a regular spray program every 10 -14 days to prevent primary establishment of mildew spores. It is often difficult to see early mildew infections. Do not wait for the fine powder to appear before getting serious about a spray program.

Control weeds if you haven't already. Warm spring temperatures and moist soil provide the perfect conditions for rampant growth. High cover crops and undesirable growth under the vines can also trap cold air and increase chances of frost damage on tender buds.

Take soil samples if you haven't in years or review the reports you have. Coupled with petiole samples at bloom you will have a blueprint of how your vines are managing the nutrients available in your soil. You may need to provide amendments if past harvests have depleted your soil. Weak cane growth the prior year could be an indication of severe disease or it could just be a nutrient deficiency. Tissue tests for certain viruses are taken later in the season but soil nutrient testing can be done now. Check irrigation lines and evaluate your vineyard for signs of extreme water stress especially in sensitive varieties.

Trap gophers now. Today's generation could multiply exponentially if you don't stop them now. There are excellent cinch traps, the traditional macabees, and poisons if you must that are available. Poisons can harm beneficial predatory birds and wildlife so if you must use them, follow label directions carefully. Gophers can devastate a vineyard one vine at a time, especially when the vineyard is young.

Read up on the European Grape Moth (*lobesia beltrana*). This could be a pest that will visit our area soon. State employees are placing traps all around our AVA. Get to know your trappers and keep in touch with what is happening in your vineyard.

Install some beneficial annual flowering plants around the vineyard to enhance the biodiversity of your site. Predatory wasps and other beneficial insects thrive in an environment with lots of flowering plants. Consider yarrow, ceanothus, daisies, and sunflowers. Beneficial insects in general especially like the flowers with lots of pollen sites. These tiny warriors could be your first defense against invasive pest species.

As the season begins, take a Sunday off and attend Pinot Paradise in Campbell on March 27. This year's technical session focuses on managing acidity in the vineyard and in wine. Dr. Roger Boulton from UC Davis and Greg LaFollette of Flowers fame as well as a panel of local winegrowers will share their expertise on this topic. Tastings are included to illustrate the point. Don't miss this unique opportunity to explore the major influence of acidity on the quality of wine grapes in our AVA. Go to [scmwa.com](http://scmwa.com) for ticket information.

Enjoy the promise of Spring. The earth awakens and with it a new vintage begins.

Be well.

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