

ANNOUNCING A NEW ROUND OF
Sustainable Viticulture
Workshops

Each month from now until May of 2005 LWWC staff will be convening a self-assessment workbook workshop using the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices Workbook. Each workshop will focus on only one vineyard chapter of the workbook, e.g. viticulture, soil management, water management, ecosystem management, or pest management. At each workshop attendees will evaluate their vineyard using the featured chapter and experts will be on hand to help with the development of action plans to address important issues associated with that chapter. Dates for each workshop will be set upon consultation with growers and PCAs interested in participating. Phone Cliff or Chris at 209-367-4727, or email cliff@lodiwine.com or chris@lodiwine.com to find out more about these workshops or to sign up for one. Four continuing education hours, including 1 hour of Laws & Regs will be awarded for attending a workshop.

2005 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 10 Hang Time panel discussion. 1-5pm at the Native Sons Hall, St. Helena. Will include Drs. Andy Waker, Richard Smart, Linda Bisson, Nick Dokoozlian, and Bob Steinhauer. \$75 for non-members. Call 707-994-8311 to sign up.

January 12 Frost protection in Lodi vineyards. 9-10:30am, Central Valley Waste Management Services, 1333 E. Turner Rd. Lodi. Presenter: Paul Verdegaal UC Farm Advisor.

January 13 A Day of Discussions of GMOs in the Wine Industry. 9:30am-3:30pm at COPIA in Napa. The event costs \$75, lunch is included. Call 707-994-8311 to register.

January 25-27 Unified Wine & Grape Symposium. Sacramento Convention Center. Call 800-550-1496 or visit www.unifiedsymposium.org for registration and information.

February 1-2 2005 Plant & Soil Conference. Modesto Conference Center & Double Tree Inn, Modesto. Sessions will be on the following topics: Ag Waiver, Air Quality, Nutrient Management, Pest Management, and Managing Soil Organic Matter. For more information visit <http://calasa.ucdavi.edu>



LODI - WOODBRIDGE WINEGRAPE COMMISSION

RESEARCH · IPM NEWSLETTER

Hang Time in Lodi

BY CLIFF OHMART
LWWC Research/IPM Director



One of the most talked about issues this season is this thing called 'Hang Time'. It seems like every grower I've talked to since harvest mentioned it at some point in our conversation. Several growers have contacted LWWC staff and asked if there is anything the Commission can do about this issue. The goal of this column is to briefly outline the topic, tell you where you can go to get more information, and let you know what the Commission is going to do to address it. Some of the information comes from Nat DiBudio's Presidential Message in the November issue of the Allied Grower Growers Newsletter (www.alliedgrape-growers.org) with the wonderful title "Girlie Men, Losers, Hang-Time and Vintage Dating" and also from a column that appears in the November newsletter of the California Association of Winegrape Growers (www.cawg.org).

Over the past few years many wineries have been asking growers to leave grapes out hanging on the vine longer and longer in order to allow them to reach fuller flavors and achieve optimum ripeness, thus the term 'hang time'. Traditionally, growers and wineries have used objective measures, such as Brix, to determine harvest dates, contract standards and proper compensation. Unfortunately, many of the measures associated with determining the length of hang time, such as 'flavors', are more subjective, based on little or no research, and therefore ripe for debate, so to speak. Throw in the fact that long hang time is associated with fruit dehydration (loss of weight) and you have the makings for lots of arguments, misunderstandings, and frustrated growers.

Furthermore, the unusual growing season of 2004 seems to have brought the hang time issue to the front burner. Red and white varieties were ready to harvest at the same time causing backups at the winery and winery capacities were not able to process the grapes in a timely manner. This resulted in longer hang times in many vineyards whether wanted or not. I am sure many growers were wondering whether they were being asked to delay their harvest for legitimate reasons related to wine quality or simply because the winery could not handle

the grapes. In either case, they knew that longer hang times meant reduced tonnage and subsequent lower returns.

The LWWC Research Committee devoted a significant amount of time at their November meeting discussing this issue. It was clear that every member considered this a very serious issue, that there were important points to consider from both the grower and winery perspective, and that we need to be careful and not just point fingers at the other side and say it is all their fault. The Committee decided the first thing to do was to find out what is known about hang time and its effects on flavor, ripeness, wine quality, and the long term effects on vine health, particularly for vineyards that are also being managed using deficit irrigation. Initial inquiries have determined that quite a bit is already being done regarding accumulating known information on hang time. For example, the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) Board of Directors has asked its staff to seek a follow-up meeting of a subcommittee of the Wine Institute's Technical Issues Committee and CAWG representatives to re-convene discussions that were initiated last February on the topic of grape maturity and hang time. The Board also voted to sponsor regional Smart Market workshops to facilitate grower education about business practices associated with contracts and working with wineries to meet clearly spelled out expectations and agreements for compensation. And finally, CAWG has contracted with Stan Grant, Progressive Viticulture, to do a literature review on this issue. His goal is to provide CAWG with a preliminary report by the first of February with a summation of research done to date, gaps in knowledge and a suggested list of projects for future research. Furthermore, some wineries are doing field trials to gather data on the relationships between hang time, ripeness, flavors, wine quality and vine health. Also, there are industry meetings being held over the next few months designed to inform growers about the current knowledge on the issue and generate public dialogue.

At the moment it appears the most important thing LWWC can do on this issue

is to find out what is known and what is being done by other groups to answer the unknowns. By this coming February, the Research Committee will assess the situation and if it is clear there are some important unanswered questions for Lodi growers that can be dealt with locally, actions will then be taken to answer these questions, either through literature searches, field trials or both.

In the meantime there are two meetings to bring to your attention. The first is a 'Hang Time' seminar sponsored by the Napa Valley Grape Growers Association on January 10th from 1-5pm at the Native Sons Hall in St. Helena. The panel will include Drs. Andy Waker, Richard Smart, Linda Bisson, Nick Dokoozlian, and Bob Steinhauer. The event costs \$75 for non-members. Call 707-994-8311 to sign up. The second meeting is a breakout session at the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium at the Sacramento Convention Center Wednesday January 26th from 2-4 pm. The title of the session is "Evolving Contract Issues: Beyond Brix".

In conclusion, from the growers perspective, if the way the wineries are going to do business in the future is to insist upon longer hang times, then either a regulatory or contractual solution to needs to be found to compensate growers for the lost tonnage. At the yields and prices currently being paid for high Brix grapes it will make it difficult if not impossible for most growers to survive.

If you have further questions and concerns on this issue do not hesitate to contact myself or Chris Storm at the Commission's office.

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GROWER PROFILE: *Joe Valente*

BY CHRIS STORM

When having a conversation with Joe Valente you would think he is a pretty kick back guy who, in his own words, takes an open-minded approach to farming. However, lurking under his calm easy going exterior persona is a man full of passion about his farming community, its schools, winegrowing, and the wildlife in and around the vineyards he manages.

Joe Valente has been a part of the Lodi community since he was born in 1959. He was raised on a wheat, tomato and alfalfa farm near Lodi and attended Tokay High School where he took an active roll in the Future Farmers of America (FFA). After graduating from Tokay High School, he enrolled at Delta College where he earned his AA degree in plant science. Within two months after graduating from Delta College, Joe accomplished two other lifetime milestones; he got his first post-college job at Kautz Farms as an assistant vineyard manager and married Claudia, his wife of 25 years. That means this coming January Joe will be celebrating his silver anniversary with Kautz farms and more importantly, his wife.

Joe's active roll in the FFA as a High School student has rubbed off on his daughter Amy. Joe and Amy were recently featured in the book "California Vineyards and Wildlife Habitat" (California Association of Winegrape Growers, 2003) in which Amy's FFA project was one of the feature articles. In 1999 Amy needed to come up with an FFA project, so Joe suggested monitoring the ranches wood duck boxes. Apparently, one of the employees at Kautz Farms decided to build a few wood duck nest boxes to place around the ranches to support the employee's hunting hobby. After a couple of years, the employee left the company leaving behind the boxes and an increasing wood duck population. Amy and Joe decided to incorporate the wood duck boxes into her FFA project. Since then, Joe and his family have built and placed more than 50 wood duck boxes around the vineyards. With the help of the California Waterfowl Association (CWA) who provided monitoring guidance and data sheets, the Valentines monitor all 50 boxes up to 9 times during the nesting season.

During the 2004 season, the Valentines monitored the 50 boxes from March to July and recorded that of the 639 eggs laid, 427 hatched. Each monitoring outing includes a ladder, clip board and an inventory of eggs, hens, ducklings and any other interesting information like the presence of other bird species. Kestrels, woodpeckers, and starlings also move into the boxes. Joe doesn't mind the Kestrels, but the woodpecker and starlings are removed. On average there are 15 eggs per box and the Valentines have counted as many as 50 eggs per box, although this isn't a healthy situation because many of the eggs are ignored by the adult birds and won't survive.

Along with the nest boxes, Joe thinks it's important to improve other aspects of wood duck habitat. On one of Kautz Farms properties, an old dairy pond was scheduled to be back-filled with dirt, but instead, Joe decided to restore and enhance the pond for waterfowl habitat. The Valentines and Kautz Farms have planted native oaks, grasses, shrubs around the pond and every year a bit of cover crop seed is saved from the vineyards to provide forage for pond inhabitants. They have also installed wood duck boxes, raptor perches and owl boxes around the pond. The wood ducks aren't the only waterfowl seen visiting the pond; it is also home to Canadian Geese, mallard ducks and herons.

Joe's role with Tokay High School doesn't just stop in helping with Amy's FFA project. In

fact, his involvement with local schools is extensive. Joe is the coach for the vineyard pruning and judging team at Tokay High School and since he became coach, the team has won 2 state vineyard pruning competitions and one state judging competition. He also serves on the Tokay HS agriculture advisory board and was instrumental in getting the Tokay High School grape variety block started. This one-acre demonstration vineyard is so complete and well designed, it rivals those at some of the nation's best viticultural universities. With a donation from the Lodi Woodbridge Winegrape Commission Research Committee, of which Joe is also a member, the vineyard was planted in 2001 and consists of 47 varieties (16 vines per variety, 800 vines total) of table, raisin, and winegrapes. Joe oversees the management of the vineyard and does all the spraying and tractor work.

Joe is also a 4H leader helping kids ages 8-18 with wood working skills. The 17 or so 4H'ers build bird houses and feeders and learn wood working safety skills. Joe also engages many high school classes about farming and agriculture, but he most recently hosted a field trip of 30 kindergarteners in one of Kautz's apple orchards. He was blown away with the enthusiasm of the little 5 year-olds and of all the groups he has hosted over the years, he enjoyed the experience and questions from those youngsters the most.

Joe believes that because kids will be future food purchasers, they should know where their food is being produced. "Most kids have never been to a farm" says Joe, who is trying his best to change their attitudes and perceptions of farming. He wants to make it clear to the younger generation that "farmers are good stewards of the land." Joe says that "if a farmer destroys the land through poor management, then a crop can't be produced. Farmers have to continually improve what they do, because as housing consumes good farm land, food will have to be produced on fewer and fewer acres" which requires sustainable management practices and a healthy ecosystem.

Aside from all of his extracurricular activities, Joe finds time to actually manage vineyards, too. When Joe started in 1980 as the assistant vineyard manager, serving in this position for 8 years before assuming the role of full vineyard manager, Kautz Farms had just installed one of the first drip irrigation systems in the Lodi region. Since then, they have steadily converted 100% of their vineyard acres over to drip (about 4,500 miles of drip hose), a technique that even with all the other viticultural advancements over the last quarter century, Joe thinks is still the most important. In 1980, flood irrigation was the most common way to deliver water to grapevines, but Joe and John Kautz became worried about the irrigation runoff and discharge resulting from the flooding and decided it was time to convert to drip irrigation. Aside from reduced runoff, Joe says that drip irrigation has other advantages, including allowing farmers to plant grapes in areas that would normally be too steep and unmanageable to support flood irrigation.



YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 25

ACRES MANAGED:
5,000 acres of winegrapes
40 acres of apples
60 acres of cherries

VARIETIES GROWN:
Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay,
Merlot, Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot,
Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Symphony,
Sauvignon Blanc, Tempranillo,
Viognier, Zinfandel

Joe's farming philosophy is to keep an open mind. In following with this philosophy, Joe has tried just about everything in his farming. From planting wheat under the vines and knocking it down with Glyphosate to create a mulch, to applying sugar through the drip lines to stimulate soil microbial growth, to using vinegar as an herbicide, Joe as experimented with it all, finding what works and what obviously doesn't work.

Nearly 85% of Kautz Farms are machine harvested and almost 400 acres are minimally

pruned. Joe started experimenting with minimal pruning back in the early 1990's and is always amazed when a winemaker visits a minimally pruned vineyard. Before the visit, the winemaker likes the wine quality, but after the vineyard visit, the wine maker wants nothing to do with the grapes. Joe says there are so many hurdles too overcome in this industry based solely on perceptions that are rarely justified. Joe's favorite trellis system is the horizontal quad with a 36 inch cross arm, which Joe employs on 80-90% of his vineyard

acreage. This allows the fruit zone to be spread out, while providing a balanced crop and vine.

Joe Valente is a busy man. Whether he is tending to 50 wood duck nest boxes, helping 4H'ers learn wood working skills, coaching the Tokay High School vineyard pruning team, teaching 30 kindergarteners about growing apples or farming 5,000 acres of winegrapes, Joe remains the easy going farmer who will try just about anything to produce high quality winegrapes.

IN THE VINEYARD

BY PAUL S. VERDEGAAL

University of California
Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor

The early finish to the 2004 season makes last year's vintage seem a fairly distant memory. Some difficult times also seem to be fading into history, but even though the grape glut appears past, the "road has yet to begin rising to meet" the average grower. With hopes of better prices there is also hope for a normal winter and spring to start 2005. So far a good rainfall total has accumulated, and as winter approaches the last couple of weeks have provided enough chilling hours to catch up to normal.

During the past four years the tough times have also required continued efforts towards quality, even with higher costs and lower prices. Now to complicate matters, many growers are struggling with longer hang times to harvest and lower crops as part of the quality and marketing equation. Both items will require more discussions and are already on the agenda of meetings scheduled for the very near future.

As pruning begins in earnest across the district, there is still plenty of uncertainty about everything from pricing to new regulations. Whatever your concerns and goals are, the point of departure for 2005 begins with pruning. There is one certainty, which will continue to be the focus of growers and wineries and that is demand for quality. The goal of that optimum (maximum in some cases) fruit quality starts with the "Holy Grail" of balanced vines.

What is a "balanced vine" and when do you know that you have balance? A typical Farm Advisor type answer might be: that depends. But a more workable answer and a reasonable guideline is: for lightly cropped vines or vines that have been cluster thinned, final shoot length on average should be about 30 to 36 inches plus or minus a few fingers by late June, just before veraison. Shoots of that length will generally provide enough active canopy, if leaves are in good shape. For vines with a heavy crop or two good-sized clusters on each shoot, then 36 to 42 inches should provide sufficient surface area of leaves. In both cases no new growth is needed after veraison starts (early July), but as many leaves as possible should be in good health and functional.

That is not rigorously scientific, but it seems grape growing is an artful science (or a scientific art) most of the time.

Pruning time will set the stage for the goal of balanced vines, which are also influenced by the year (not much you can do as a grower) and by the availability of water and nutrients (both somewhat under your control). Pruning time is a good time to review vines for balance in a measurable way to make adjustments for the coming season. An objective evaluation besides shoot length can be of help in estimating vine balance and trying to adjust it by measuring dormant prunings. If you are still able to mark off some vines for pruning weights on individual vines at this time, try to do it. These vines should be representative of the vineyard and the same ones selected each year. From these "indicator vines", an average pruning weight is compared to the average crop yield per vine, calculated from the field average of tons per acre. The comparison of this crop to prunings ratio was explained in the LWWC In the Vineyard of December 2000. The LWWC office may be able to run a copy off or check my office web site, in research reports section under Viticulture and Almonds at www.cesanjoaquin.ucdavis.edu.

Now is also a good time to monitor weed populations in two or three (if not more) representative areas to record what weeds are present. A written record can help track changes or problems that might be better dealt with by changing herbicide selection or timing of applications and any additional strategies to prevent a noxious or perennial weeds (puncture vines, sandburs, Johnsongrass, bindweed, Bermudagrass, etc.) from getting out of control. Although more weeds and more diversity of resident vegetation are tolerable, some weeds are not as "cooperative" as others in reduced chemical input environments. Check out the following sites (if by chance you have some free time) for information on weeds and weed control:

www.ipm.ucdavis.edu
www.cdafa.ca.gov/ipc/encycloveedia

Besides getting the pruning and trellis

repair done and monitoring weeds, if some time is left in your schedule make some notes about areas in the field that seem to accumulate water or have standing water for more than 12 to 24 hours at a time after rain. Those would be good areas to recheck after budbreak and through the summer for some problems of vigor or lack of it. That may give you some valuable clues about strategies for correcting problems you see later in the year.

During the winter hold off on any fertilizer applications before March, until just before budbreak for slow release materials or until after bloom for soil-applied formulations that are quickly available for uptake. Exceptions might include potassium fertilizers or soil amendments such as gypsum, soil sulfur, lime or compost. Talk over your nutrient needs with your PCA, Cliff or Chris at the LWWC or give me call if you don't mind talking to a university type.

With good chilling hours early on, a good bud break might well be expected this spring and possibly a better crop from more clusters if conditions are "normal". However, weather tends to be unpredictable and the vines never read the most current literature and a lot of subtle factors may influence what develops. Recent research seems to indicate that vine stress, in the form of crop load, excessively high or low temperatures during the growing season, severe water deficits, insect damage, etc. may have more than just a one-year carry-over effect. Many local vineyards may still need more time for recovery to produce a bumper crop. So, even though we have had two lighter-than-average harvests, 2005 would be a good bet for a big crop by traditional experience, it may be 2006 before we see a huge crop. Whether a bumper crop happens or not, quality should still sell your grapes. That the Lodi district can provide high quality with good value is not doubted by most people any longer. The test will be to meet quality demands, but not unduly stress vines in reaching those goals. Good luck in 2005.