



RESEARCH • IPM NEWSLETTER

The Next Step for LWWC's Sustainable Viticulture Program

BY CLIFF OHMART
LWWC Research/IPM Director

In early 2000, after a year and a half of hard work by many LWWC members the *Lodi Winegrower's Workbook: A self-assessment of integrated farming practices* was published. Since then over 40 workbook workshops, attended by over 250 LWWC growers, have been held throughout the district where attendees have received a copy of the workbook, evaluated one or more of their vineyards and developed action plans for improvement using the workbook. During and after the workshops I have received very positive feedback from many LWWC growers regarding the value of the workbook and the workshops. The results of our recent district-wide grower survey, which will be available soon, will give us a detailed assessment of how LWWC growers view the workbook program.

The publication of the *Lodi Winegrower's Workbook* created quite a stir in the California wine industry, as well as in other parts of the U.S. For example, many winegrape growers, University staff, and others in the wine industry from many different states have called the LWWC office inquiring how they can get copies of the workbook and as a result we have sold well over 300 copies. Moreover, in early 2001 Wine Institute (WI) and the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) signed a licensing agreement with LWWC to use the content from the viticulture, soil management, water management, pest management and wine quality chapters of the *Lodi Winegrower's Workbook* in a self-assessment workbook they were developing for the entire state's wine industry. I was asked to be a co-editor of their publication and several LWWC growers were members of the joint committee of WI and CAWG that oversaw the writing and publication of their workbook. In October 2002 WI and CAWG unveiled the *Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices Workbook* that encompasses not only sustainable practices in the vineyard but also in the winery. So as you can see, a lot has happened since our workbook was released in 2000.

Over the past 2 years I have given many lectures around California, and some outside the state, describing our sustainable viticulture program, including the workbook program. It is clear to audiences how much hard work LWWC growers have

done to develop these programs and establish their reputation as leaders in the implementation of sustainable viticulture. At the end of my talks I am often asked "Are LWWC growers interested in developing some kind of marketing program that would allow LWWC growers to be recognized in the marketplace for the sustainable practices they use in their vineyards?" Another common question is "What is LWWC going to do next?" About a year and a half ago we created a working group of LWWC growers and PCAs to consider the above two questions. After careful thought, thorough research into marketing programs based on sustainable farming practices, and lengthy discussions, the answer to the first question was "Yes". At this point the answer to the second question was obvious, which was to act on the first question! As a result, I devoted some of my time during the past few months to applying for grants to fund the development of a marketing program based on sustainable farming practices for LWWC growers and am pleased to announce that the following grants have recently been approved: \$10,000 from the Great Valley Center over the next

12 months; \$49,000 from US Environmental Protection Agency Region IX over a 2 year period starting now; and \$139,400 from the State Water Resources Control Board for a 2 year period starting in 2004.

There are many important things to consider when planning and developing a marketing program that will recognize and benefit LWWC growers who use specific sustainable farming practices in growing their winegrapes. First and foremost it needs to be voluntary so that interested growers can participate and hopefully benefit from their participation while the program does not have a negative affect on growers who are not interested in participating.

Secondly, the standards that are developed and used to qualify a grower for the program need to be meaningful and measurable. Thirdly, qualifying for the program needs to be technically achievable and economically feasible for all LWWC growers. Not that all vineyards will qualify every year, but if a grower chooses to enter the program their chances of success must not be limited by economics or the technology available to them. And lastly, the sustainable vineyard practices promoted by the



program need to have significant positive effects on the environment of the vineyard, the farm and the community.

To date our Sustainable Viticulture Program has focused on achieving environmental benefits, and minimizing the impact of regulations on farming. Marketing programs based on sustainable farming practices seek to provide economic rewards for implementing these practices. This type of program will be developed over the next two years under the guidance of a committee of LWWC growers and PCAs, farm advisors, and some other stakeholders in the wine industry. Outside experts, such as University scientists will be consulted on appropriate topics as needed. The system would require the establishment of a set of standards to be created by the committee mentioned above. The standards would be based on the workbook,

establishing a value for each sustainable farming practice. A third party would evaluate the grower's operation - those scoring above a specified value would qualify for a certification, often referred to as an eco-label. It is hoped that fruit sold under such a certification could command a higher price.

As this exploratory program develops, progress will be reported in this newsletter, on the LWWC website (www.lodiwine.com), and at grower meetings. It is a very exciting project and has the potential to reward LWWC growers for the years of hard work they have invested in implementing sustainable practices in their vineyards. If you would like more information about the program please contact me or Chris Storm at the LWWC office, or email me at cliff@lodiwine.com.

IN THE VINEYARD

BY PAUL S. VERDEGAAL

University of California
Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor

The harvest is well under way and gaining momentum as white Zinfandel, Pinot grigio and Sauvignon blanc lead the way. The 2003 season has been a combination of extremes. The year started cool (coolest since 1983) turned extremely hot in July (hottest in the last 20 years) and most recently the weather scared everyone with a thunderstorm in mid August, which scattered 0.14 inch of rain to as much as 0.5 inch in some locations.

As was the case last year, a select few varieties such as Pinot grigio, Petite Sirah and Sauvignon blanc, seem to have good demand and prices are okay, but for Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, and Chardonnay, it is still difficult. Although prices are still weak, wine consumption is slightly up nationally and the crop on a per acre basis appears to be average, with a much lighter set in Zinfandel and Merlot. Time and the economy will tell how good a year we may see with respect to quality and the climb out of the current down cycle.

The season as a whole is on track for degree-days, but it took the coolest April and hottest July to average it out so far. Harvest started in earnest on August

20th, which is a good 10 to 12 days behind what has become normal. The indication of a very poor set in Zinfandel and Merlot will help reduce the overall glut, but still hurts on a vineyard-by-vineyard basis. The only explanation I can come up with (and it's more opinion than fact) is the relatively dry December and the cold/wet April disrupted individual flower development. Although there was sufficient total rainfall, deep soil moisture was lacking and many vineyards showed some water stress and heat scald as the extreme high temperatures hit in July. It was difficult to avoid some vine stress without some foresight and good luck in irrigation scheduling, almost to an excessive degree.

Pest pressures were not intense early on, but mite problems and leafhoppers have been widespread late in the season. Driving around it appears there are a significant number of vineyards that were treated for mites. If there was any blessing to the unexpected thunderstorm it may have washed a few mites off and hasn't seemed to cause major bunch rot problems! Fortunately powdery mildew has not been a major problem. It seems no matter what the individual manage-

ment strategy might have been; mites and hoppers were active problems. The Glassy-Winged Sharp Shooter has been held at bay by the ongoing monitoring program of the County Ag Commissioner staff, but there are troubling reports of several Vine Mealy Bug (VMB) finds. Efforts are under way to eradicate these apparent infestations. If you see any suspicious insect pest activity give the LWWC staff or me a call. Harvest is a busy time, but vigilance is the keyword for growers, PCAs, and harvest crews (both hand and machine). A more comprehensive survey for VMB is in the initial phase of trap distribution as we try to deal with the new threat.

As to the bottom line of grape prices, they seem to have leveled out with a minor upswing at the low-end from \$65 a ton last year back towards \$100 or higher. While prices may be low, with some cooperation from Mother Nature quality should be good. During this current down cycle there appears to be a light at the end of the tunnel and it doesn't seem to have a train whistle associated with it. A strengthening economy and more stability in the Magic Kingdom of Sacramento may help. More importantly, quality and value will continue to sell fruit, which makes the Lodi District very hard to ignore.

Good luck with vintage 2003!

**ANNOUNCING A NEW
PUBLICATION AVAILABLE
ON WINEGRAPE VARIETIES
FROM THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA**

Winegrape Varieties in California by L. P. Christensen, N. K. Dokoozian, M. A. Walker, and J. A. Wolpert. University of California ANR Publication 3419. 188pp. (Paul Verdegaal is a contributing author). This publication gives detailed descriptions of clusters, berries, and leaves, growth and soil adaptability, rootstock information, clones, production, harvest, training and pruning, canopy management and more, for 36 varieties grown in California. The book is illustrated with outstanding color photographs and drawings. For information on ordering phone 1-800-994-8849 or visit <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>



VITICULTURE INTERNS AVAILABLE TO HELP INTERESTED LWWC GROWERS

Global Outreach is a nonprofit organization that arranges internships for young professionals who want to learn about the U.S. agricultural industry. They work closely with agricultural and rural youth organizations overseas to select top individuals who are ready to contribute to your business when they arrive at your doorstep. They are currently searching for Viticulture hosts willing to train international interns in all aspects of their business. They have groups arriving at various times year round. If you are interested in finding out more about hosting an intern, please contact Susie Christensen at 612-333-2353.

GROWER PROFILE: *Frank Olagaray*

BY CHRIS STORM

Back in 1994, Frank Olagaray's father decided grapes were worth more than any row crop so he gifted equal shares of his 240 acres over to his four sons. This is how Frank got his start in the wine-grape industry. However, this wasn't his first experience with farming. Frank claims he's been driving a tractor since he was four.

Frank was born and raised in Lodi. His father was a dairy milker west of Thornton and later raised sheep and farmed row crops on Stanton Island. In 1980 Frank joined into a partnership with his three other brothers growing wheat and barley in the Dunigan Hills. He decided to test his farming skills away from his family and in 1986 bought a ranch in northwestern Nevada near Lovelock and raised cattle and hay. He lived in Nevada for several years until in 1989 when he decided to move back to California and attend Delta College. After graduating from Delta and wanting more education he moved to San Luis Obispo to attend Cal Poly until he graduated in 1993 with a degree in Ag Business and an option in marketing. He then worked for Adams Grain Co. in Woodland for a year until his father gifted him the 60 acres and he joined the winegrape industry.

Since 1994, Frank has been slowly expanding his acreage and varieties. He has two main vineyard locations, one west of Thornton and the other southwest of Lodi. Frank just built a house surrounded by his vineyards on his ranch west of Thornton and lives there with his young daughter and wife.

Frank enrolled thirty-three acres of

Chardonnay into the BIFS program in January of 2002 and enjoys having another pair of eyes in the vineyard. Just a few of the sustainable viticulture practices that he uses include growing cover crops in all of his vineyards, leaf removal, weekly pest monitoring, RDI, and drip irrigation. More importantly, he hasn't used a pre-emergent herbicide in 4 years. He feels that these chemicals kill the soil microbes, which are extremely important for a healthy vine and wine quality. Frank believes that very little is known about the effect our practices are having on soil environment and the less we do to the soil the better. Rather than use herbicides under the vine, he uses the Pellenc sunflower for weed control during the summer and he grazes his father's sheep in some of his vineyards during the winter. When an herbicide treatment is essential, he will use only contact herbicides and apply them using an enviromist sprayer, ensuring a precise application and greatly limiting drift. Frank rarely applies nitrogen fertilizer and only applies potash in limited amounts. He also uses green waste compost to improve soil tilth and overall health.

Frank believes "nobody has it right". He thinks that in an industry which is constantly changing, a grower has to accept new techniques to stay profitable. Frank also enjoys trying new approaches in his vineyards because it keeps him from getting bored and it allows him to see first hand what works and what doesn't. Much of his free time is absorbed in reading and listening for some new way to improve his enterprise. Frank recently attended Fetzer's seminar



YEARS IN THE WINEGRAPE INDUSTRY: 9

ACRES IN THE DISTRICT: 240 acres

VARIETIES GROWN: Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Syrah, Merlot, Petit Sirah and Cabernet Sauvignon

on converting to organic viticulture where he learned even more on the topics of sustainability and organic grape growing. He is transitioning much of his acreage to organic and should be certifiable in a year.

Frank has installed most of his vineyard acreage himself and trains his vines using a VSP system mainly because of the ease for mechanical operations. He recently purchased a Pellenc 3400 Grape Harvester, which also has pre-pruning, hedging, and spraying attachments. It is an incredible machine with smart attention to detail and easy to use. The machine is state of the art with an on-board computer that controls such features as automatic steering, leveling, and ground following. I was able to ride in the new harvester while talking with Frank and the excitement in his voice when talking about the machine's capabilities is probably similar to the excitement he showed when he drove his first tractor at age four.

Organic Winegrape Production Short-Course

Organic winegrapes are among the most important organically grown commodities in California. In response to rapid growth in this agricultural sector, UC Cooperative Extension and UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP) are sponsoring a two-day intensive organic winegrowing short course November 17-18 at the Brutocao Vineyard Plaza in Hopland, California. The short course will emphasize successful practices used by California organic winegrowers. Researchers will present summaries of current organic research. Presenters will address key organically acceptable viticultural practices such as soil management, vineyard design and canopy management, cover cropping and the use of compost. Weed, disease, insect, mite and nematode management will be addressed, as will the topic of vineyards in the landscape. The techniques and practices of organic winemaking will also be discussed (and tasted!).

For more information and to register for the short course (\$225.00), please contact Glenn McGourty at 707-463-4495 or gmcgourty@ucdavis.edu.

Other Courses of Interest

Nov. 6: Innovative strategies for farm success: Learn the science and economics behind sustainable soil fertility. Presented by Grover Soil Solutions at the Radisson Hotel Sacramento. 8am to 4pm. \$49 registration before October 25 and \$59 registration after October 25. For more information contact Jan at 1-800-585-4401.

FALL COURSES FROM UC DAVIS EXTENSION

OCT. 21

Introduction to grapevine diseases and identification. 9am-4pm, \$180.

OCT. 22

Advances in understanding grapevine diseases. 9am-4pm, \$180.

OCT. 24

Vertebrate pest management in agriculture. 9am-4pm, \$150.

DEC. 2

Agricultural labor law. 9am-5pm, \$185.

DEC. 10

Pesticide regulatory update. 9am-4:30pm, \$190.

*Courses held at the Da Vinci Building,
1632 D Vinci Ct., in Davis.
Fee includes course material and box lunch.*

For registration or information on
UC Davis Extension classes call:
1-800-752-0881 or visit:
www.extension.ucdavis.edu

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