

## Talking with winegrape buyers about LODI RULES.

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Questions that winegrape buyers may be thinking when negotiating a deal:

“ **Why should I buy your grapes?  
What does this sustainable certification mean for me?** ”

We all know that it's never smart to have all of your eggs in one basket. This is why you have watched some growers vertically integrate and build a winery. Some growers have hustled and marketed their vineyards and grapes to new buyers, which has paid off. It's not easy to deal with multiple buyers or to farm just a few rows in a different way than the rest of the block, but it is financially paying off in the long-term for many of our LODI RULES growers. These growers have gone way past their comfort zone to remain profitable. But - being profitable is a lot more comfortable in the end than being in the hole, am I right??

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**The LODI RULES program gives you a means to stand out in a sea of grapevines, gives you a story to tell, helps you prove your worth as a quality winegrape grower, and provides networking opportunities.**

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You, as a LODI RULES grower, are already ahead of the game if you would like to diversify your buyers, which usually means growing premium winegrapes and selling to smaller wineries too. (*Bonus tip/logical advice:* start networking in the sustainable winegrowing community BEFORE you have grapes to sell!! Come to our annual Spring Social!)

You know your operating budget (LR 1.5) which puts you ahead of many other farmers. When a grape buyer asks you to do certain farming practices which incur added expenses (leafing, dropping fruit, etc.), you will be prepared with those costs and know if you need a higher price per ton or acre to meet your desired profit margin window. There are premium buyers out there who are willing and even happy to pay extra to be able to know and trust that the farmer will do what the buyer wants (even when the farmer thinks it is unnecessary). If you're selling to a larger buyer where price is less negotiable, you at least know if the price offered is profitable or not (again, this puts you ahead of the majority of growers).

LODI RULES certified grapes meet such a high sustainability bar that they are accepted into other wine label programs: Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW) and Sonoma Sustainable. When you have LODI RULES certified grapes entering the marketplace, be sure to explore wineries using a LODI RULES or CALIFORNIA RULES seal, a CCSW logo, or a Sonoma County Sustainable wine label. Also search for wineries that believe in sustainability. Then, narrow your lists down to wineries that are open to grapes from your AVA. Third, figure out which wineries make wines from the grape varieties you grow. When you visit the winery or court the buyer, you already have something in common to talk about – sustainability and a passion for a particular grape variety.



## Five examples of points that LODI RULES growers can make during winegrape marketing.

Translate these messages into your own words so that you sound natural and feel comfortable. Be ready to provide concrete, simple, logical examples for each point in case you are asked to elaborate.

1. Our grapes are certified in the LODI RULES program on an annual basis and I've been a LODI RULES grower for \_\_\_ years. They come with a certificate which means that you also have the option of including a certified seal on your wine label – here's the information if you are interested.  
*(give the buyer a copy of the LODI RULES or CALIFORNIA RULES Winery Handbook and Branding Guidelines – copies available from the Lodi Winegrape Commission)*
2. Because our grapes are certified in the LODI RULES program, we have audited record keeping which proves to you that we monitor for and protect the vines from pests and diseases, treat our workers well, and carefully manage water, soil, and nutrients for optimum vine health and winegrape quality.
3. I'm the type of grower who likes to go above and beyond, which is one reason why we are part of the LODI RULES sustainable winegrowing program. We like to overdeliver on expectations and farm in an environmentally and socially responsible way.
4. The third tenet of sustainability is being economically viable for the long-term. Just like you, we operate to be profitable which means that we are not struggling financially nor are we cutting corners when it comes to quality winegrape farming and meeting your expectations.
5. I make the choice to pay to be certified under the LODI RULES program every year, which holds me accountable to a set of over 100 scientifically backed farming practices that were designed by growers and viticulturists, then accredited by world renowned professionals, to improve winegrape quality.

Remember, every time you deliver certified grapes, you are representing not only yourself but also everyone else in the LODI RULES program.

You are doing an outstanding job of making us proud to be part of this community! Wow! You're winning awards left and right, your grapes are going into ultra-premium wines all over the world, people from across the globe are seeking vineyard tours and speeches about the LODI RULES program, you're talking about sustainability on your websites and Instagram, you're teaching your staff what sustainability means, and you're networking with each other to build our community.

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**The more you deliver quality-wise, the better reputation we all have. The easier you are to work with, the more professional you are, the more awards that wines made from your grapes earn, the higher price point your grapes sell for – all of these things work to improve the reputation and value of the LODI RULES program. We want all of you to be incredibly successful, not just because we genuinely like you, but also because it makes us look good too.**

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THANK YOU. It's an honor and a pleasure to know you.

- Stephanie Bolton & the LODI RULES Committee