

# WINES & VINES

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## Sharpest Winegrape Pruning Skill on Display Napa vineyard workers square off at annual competition

by [Andrew Adams](#)

*Oakville, Calif.*—You might call it beginner's luck when Jose Juan Tellez won the Napa County Pruning Contest held Thursday in Oakville: It was his first time competing in the annual event.

According to Tellez, though, he's been pruning for 10 years and knows how to work a pair of pruning shears. Speaking with the help of a translator, Tellez said he focuses on working fast but also to make clean cuts and keep debris to a minimum.

Tellez posted the best score of the final four pruners in a contest that began with 79 contestants representing 40 vineyard companies from throughout Napa County.

Pruners were judged for time and quality using a 100-point scale: 40 points for speed and 60 for quality. After each contestant pruned six cordon-trained vines to leave two-bud spurs, a team of three judges inspected their work and meted out demerits for poor cuts, leaving suckers or leaving pruned debris in trellis wires or between rows.

"They can prune very fast, but there's the chance they could lose a lot of points," said Garrett Buckland, a vineyard consultant with Premium Viticultural Services, who is also a member of the [Napa Valley Grapegrowers](#) board. Buckland helped run the contest by collecting times and scores. He said some of the top speeds were around two-and-a-half minutes.

Contestants deftly moved their shears through vines, nipping off canes and then pulling them free of the trellis wires. The contest, held at the Gamble Ranch, began at 8 a.m., and the main part of the competition wrapped up a few hours later. After the field had been winnowed to 10, the final four faced another round of pruning. Tellez of Gallegos Vineyards came in first, followed by Sergio Rubio of Bettinelli Vineyards, Jesus Juarez of Moulds Family Vineyard and Jorge Anguiano of Komes Ranch.



**CLICK PHOTO TO PLAY VIDEO:** *Napa County Pruning Contest.*

**Cash and prizes for the winners**

Tellez took home \$600 plus a trophy belt buckle, pruning shears, holster, saw, winter coat and gift certificates. Rubio won \$400, shears, holster, a handsaw and gift certificates. Rubio won \$200 plus shears and a holster, and Anguiano received \$100 plus shears and a holster.

The cash and prizes for the event were supplied by the contest sponsors: [Central Valley Builders Supply](#), [A & J Vineyard Supply](#), Arcadia Vineyards, Beckstoffer Vineyards, Bettinelli Vineyard Management, California Grower Foundation, Clark Vineyard Management, [Crop Care Associates](#), [Gripple Inc.](#), [Growtech Inc./ARS](#), [Harlan Estate](#), Kelly Maher Viticultural Services, Michael Wolf Vineyard Services, [Novavine Grapevine Nursery](#), [Premiere Viticultural Services](#), [Rainbow Ag Services](#), Renteria Vineyard Management, [Rios Farming Co.](#), [Sunridge Nurseries](#), Swanson Vineyards, The Napa Valley Reserve, [Vineyard Industry Products Co.](#), [Vintage Crop Insurance](#), [Walsh Vineyards Management](#), [Wilbur-Ellis](#) and [Wyatt Irrigation Supply Inc.](#)

**Pruning skills improving**

After judging a pruning job, Kirk Grace, vineyard manager for [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](#) and Julie Nord, owner of [Nord Vineyard Services](#), and Josh Clark of Clark Vineyard Management all said they had been impressed with the overall quality of pruning at the day's competition.

"This is probably the best pruned block of vines in Napa Valley," joked Grace. Nord replied: "Well at least the best pruned block on this ranch."

Nord and Grace said they let their vineyard managers and foremen pick who would represent their companies at the day's competition. They said it is good opportunity for everyone on the vineyard side of the industry to see each other, catch up and compare notes on the season.

Clark said his company held an internal competition to pick the top pruners to advance to the countywide contest.

Buckland said he was happy to see a good turnout for the event and an improvement in the pruning on display. "Quality is much better. The people who are coming back get better and better every year."

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