



# BEST PRACTICES FOR ABANDONED AND NEGLECTED VINEYARDS

*Prepared by the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Industry Issues Committee*

Abandoned or neglected vineyards pose a serious threat to our agricultural systems in the Napa Valley. An untended vineyard in an abandoned or neglected state can easily become a reservoir for various pests. These pests and related diseases can weaken a vineyard and its long-term viability, as well as threaten neighboring vineyards. Damages and vine death resulting from the potential spread of pathogens could have even farther reaching effects well outside of our own region, requiring the involvement of county, state, and federal agencies to mitigate. Pest reservoirs may also result in the increased need for and number of pesticide applications, which both works against sustainability efforts and increases the costs of farming.

Thus, to protect your vineyard and/or neighboring vineyards from increased risk, it's important to be cognizant of properties that have fallen into an abandoned or neglected state.

## **What is an abandoned or neglected vineyard?**

Simple signs include:

- Vines that are not pruned or maintained, with excess sucker growth
- Vines containing mummified fruit from the previous growing seasons
- Excess brush, tree and weed growth
- Neglected trellis, irrigation, frost-control and farm equipment
- Erosion control issues in and around the vineyard

*Note: Blocks that are scheduled to be removed in the spring may look abandoned for a period of time, if removal is delayed as a result of weather.*

## **The Law**

[The California Food and Ag Code](#) regulates abandoned or neglected crops. The law aims to protect the greater public from potentially detrimental conditions or pest population impacts on the public. Officials will often try to work with landowners to get properties back into compliance. If it becomes necessary, legal proceedings can be lengthy and costly to both the property owner and taxpayers.

*Food and Agricultural Code (FAC), Div. 4, Sct. 5551 – Ch. 7 Abatement of Neglected or Abandoned Crops*

Any neglected or abandoned plant or crop is a public nuisance in any of the following circumstances:

- A. It is a menace to the agriculture of the county, district, or vicinity because of the existence of any pest, in or on it.
- B. It is a menace to the agriculture of the county, district, or vicinity because of the existence of any other condition than the condition described in subdivision (a).
- C. It is a host plant of, or provides a favorable or likely harbor for, any pest.  
(Enacted by Stats. 1967, Ch. 15.)

## **Pest and Disease**

Pest populations can spread to neighboring vineyards - potentially carrying disease and/or increasing the need for controls. In general, as vineyard health is negatively impacted, pest mobility increases. Once weakened, vines become increasingly vulnerable to other pests and diseases, thus kicking off a cycle of pest and disease pressures that can get out of hand quickly. Depending on the season, a grower may face limitations regarding viable treatments. For example, a population bloom in late season could have detrimental effects at a time when controls may be limited due to pre-harvest intervals mandated by many inputs.

*Potential pests can come in a variety of forms:*

- **Vertebrates** - Unchecked rodent populations can lead to vine damage in surrounding vineyards either through root damage or vine girdling.
- **Insects and nematodes** - Unchecked insect and nematode populations can spread bacterial and viral diseases, such as Fan Leaf Virus, Red Blotch, Pierce's Disease, and more. Larval stages, such as moth larvae, are also capable of causing damage to shoots, leaves, and fruit.
- **Non-native Insects** - Non-native insects can be harder to identify and control. The discovery of non-native pest species may result in the implementation of quarantines at the local, state and federal level that impose restrictions on all residents of the region.
- **Diseases** - Abandoned and neglected vineyards can become an inoculum reservoir for diseases that may spread to neighbors via spores or insects. Growers may not notice the risk until it has fully established. For example, underlying Eutypa Dieback and other trunk diseases from one season may not surface with harmful effect until the next pruning season or bud break.
- **Weeds** - Invasive or aggressive weeds can proliferate in abandoned blocks and spread to adjacent vineyards.

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE THE OWNER OF AN ABANDONED OR NEGLECTED VINEYARD:**

### **Ways to resolve and minimize impact on neighbors and industry**

- **Know your neighbors** - Their issues are your issues. Stewardship is collaborative.
- **Take action** - Remove or rehabilitate unhealthy vineyards; monitor and control pest populations; and design and implement a farm plan that includes an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan.
- **Utilize resources** - Contact your local UC Extension or Agricultural Commissioner's office; hire a professional vineyard management firm, viticulturist or Pest Control Adviser; or consider leasing your property to another grower.

- **Address issues promptly** – ‘Pay me now or pay me later’ is applicable to vineyards, so don’t wait to take action or seek assistance. Ignoring the problem and having to go through an abatement process with the County is time consuming and costly.

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND AN ABANDONED OR NEGLECTED VINEYARD IN YOUR AREA:**

### **Ways to protect your vineyard**

- **Identify and communicate** – If you can determine who owns the property, neighbor to neighbor communication is always a recommended as a first step; absentee owners may not be aware of an issue on their property
- **Seek assistance with enforcement** – If an owner cannot be reached or does not remove or rehabilitate the unhealthy vineyard in a timely fashion, reach out to your County Agricultural Commissioner’s office for support; the County has the responsibility enforce the Food and Ag Code and help bring the landowner back into compliance

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### **Additional Resources in Spanish and English**

- [NVG Viticultural Best Practices Video Series](#) including on: Botrytis, Leafhoppers, Mites, Powdery Mildew, & the Fundamentals of Designing a Farm Plan
- [NVG Seasonal Best Practices](#) including on: Clean Plant Material, Farm Planning, Responsible Spray Practices, Vineyard Disposal, & Vineyard Replanting
- [NVG Pest & Diseases webpage](#)
- [University of California Integrated Pest Management](#)