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Napa Valley Grapegrowers Report: Vaccines for Napa's farm-working community

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Karen Cakebread with Glen Newhart, president and CEO of the St. Helena Hospital Foundation working at their vaccination clinic in St. Helena.

Sarah Anne Risk photo

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Napa Valley Grapegrowers (NVG) and Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation (FWF) have been immensely grateful to work alongside an array of incredible community partners in serving the needs of Napa's farm-working community.

In this month's Napa Valley Grapegrowers' report, we would like to recognize the extraordinary volunteerism of board member Karen Cakebread. She serves on both the Napa Valley Grapegrowers and St. Helena Hospital Foundation's (SHHF) boards and has been volunteering at SHHF's vaccine clinic since it opened in February.

Tell us about your role in facilitating vaccine access for the vineyard workforce through SHHF.

Karen Cakebread: In times of need, I'm always amazed and proud of how our community rises to the occasion to help each other. Mother Nature has thrown us a few curve balls over the past several years. Between earthquakes, fires, and a pandemic, we can't seem to catch a break. COVID-19 is one we didn't see coming, and now over a year later, we're still reeling from the devastating impact.

What warms my heart is the strength of partnerships that form in times of crisis. By June 2020 the seriousness of the pandemic sunk in, and knowing it would get worse, both the NVG and FWF had shifted gears to focus on keeping farmworkers safe and healthy.

This included a statewide, bilingual education campaign on COVID-19 safety and the creation of COVID-19 safety protocols for vineyard teams. The two organizations also sought out opportunities to increase access to regular testing in the vineyard. This was the beginning of what has now become a pandemic-long partnership between Napa Valley Grapegrowers, the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation, and St. Helena Hospital Foundation.

I got involved 10 years ago with St. Helena Hospital Foundation. For me, coming from the wine industry, I was interested in learning more about our ever-evolving local health care systems. I wanted to learn how things operate inside a hospital, what new technology was being introduced, and what our local hospital was doing.

As a board member for both Napa Valley Grapegrowers and the St. Helena Hospital Foundation, I saw opportunities for synergy in working together to serve the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, and after a successful partnership, which included the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation around COVID-19 testing, it only made sense to continue working together to increase vaccine access for farmworkers.

So, since January, my specific job with the clinic has been managing the volunteers, which averages about 40 people volunteering a day during operation. To date, the vaccine clinic has administered more than 28,000 vaccines to the community. That has required a lot of coordination, for which company-wide sign-ups of vineyard teams have been incredibly helpful.

How has introducing the companywide vaccination process helped the ag community?

With the help and support of the FWF and NVG staff in coordinating appointments for vineyard teams, I think it certainly sped up the vaccination process! Rather than having to contact individuals or sign people up one at a time, SHHF was now effectively connecting with whole crews that needed to be vaccinated. It has been a model program – as shown through the fact that, at this point, the vast majority of Napa County’s vineyard and cellar workers have received at least one, if not both of their vaccines.

Coming with their teams also helped relieve some anxiety or hesitancy individuals may have been feeling — both about getting the vaccine, but also about going through the process itself, which meant having to miss work and share some personal information. Employees felt supported by employers, and ultimately, it became easier to encourage whole teams to take the opportunity to be vaccinated by all going together. We saw a massive increase of vaccinations once the company-wide process was implemented.

Describe to us the overall feeling of working at a clinic that's made so many vaccines accessible to farmworkers and the greater Napa community.

Heartwarming, joyful! Caring is essential, and caring means taking action and taking care of your community. It's a rewarding experience working around people serving others. Everyone is grateful for their vaccine; everyone is thankful for the volunteers. On that note, the clinic is fully run by volunteers — doctors, nurses, registration, community members; it wouldn't happen without them!

You can sense a genuine lightness in those that have received their first and second dose. I love to see people sitting outside after, catching up in the waiting areas following their vaccine. There's a sense of relief and hopefulness.

Being a doer is in my DNA. I have wanted to be there to help in whatever way possible, and I see many others doing the same including many fellow growers and members of the ag industry.

What has been the single most memorable aspect of working at the vaccination clinic and what part of the program makes you most proud?

To experience first-hand how much can be accomplished through working together. I am so proud of the collaboration between the staff at NVG, FWF, and SHHF; each of these organizations understood the gravity of the situation and reacted quickly.

Between the mobile testing unit and the clinic, in both instances, the response was quick and timely, with a shared intent and focus on putting essential ag workers first and keeping them safe. The way in which we have been able to increase access to vaccines for farmworkers reminds me of why I'm involved with these organizations.

To learn more about the Napa Valley Grapegrowers work during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit NVG's website, **www.napagrowers.org**. Napa Valley Grapegrowers represents 685 Napa County grape growers and associated businesses.

The Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation supports vineyard workers through education and professional development. To date, the Farmworker Foundation has offered education and professional development opportunities to more than 21,000 vineyard workers and their families. For more information, visit **www.farmworkerfoundation.org**, Facebook, and Instagram.

