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TOP STORY

Agriculture

# Napa County grape crop valued at \$736 million

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The value of the 2017 Napa County grape harvest was \$736 million, an increase of \$53 million or 7.6 percent increase over 2016.

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Maria Sestito, Register file photo

Strong demand for Napa Valley grapes—cabernet in particular- helped the value of Napa County’s grape harvest to rise 7.6 percent in 2017, from \$683 million in 2016 to \$736 million.


The average price per ton for Napa County grapes rose 11 percent to \$5,204 per ton, the highest in the state.

At the same time, in part due to a streak of hot weather in September, the total number of tons of all grapes harvested in Napa County dipped. The 2017 total of 141,578 tons was 3.3 percent less than 2016’s 146,557 tons.

California Department of Agriculture officials released the preliminary 2017 grape crop report midday Friday.

“Napa County is very healthy and profitable,” and enjoys good demand, said Glenn Proctor at the Ciatti Company, a wine and grape broker. The agricultural region is well positioned in the premium wine market, he said.

“The challenge to our industry are regulatory pressures, land values and labor costs that continue to rise dramatically,” said Proctor. “It’s not going to get any easier to maintain margins and a healthy market.”

“It is encouraging to see that the price of cabernet is up,” said Jennifer Putnam, executive director  of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers.

Putnam said normally the group would review the preliminary report but this year, due to the October fires, the association will wait until the final report is issued in early March before drawing any market conclusions.

“The fires will have an effect on this year’s report for sure,” she said. Because of the fires, some growers report delayed deliveries and payments “that might add up to a significant number” that would be better accounted for in the final report, she said.

As for the decline in tonnage, “I wouldn’t read too much into” such a small drop, Putnam said.

Cabernet sauvignon grapes continue to hold the top spot in Napa Valley, with 66,159 tons produced. That’s a 4.2 percent increase from last year’s cab crush, which totaled 63,484 tons.

At an average of \$7,474 a ton, the price for the valley’s cabernet sauvignon continues to climb, up 8.6 percent over last year’s value of \$6,881 a ton. These figures include sales from a winery to itself or in-house sales.

The average price paid for valley chardonnay in 2017 was up slightly to \$2,809, while tonnage dropped— from 25,181 in 2016 to 20,595 in 2017.

Tonnage also dropped for sauvignon blanc, from 13,537 to 12,880 tons. The price for a ton of sauvignon blanc increased to \$2,282 on average from \$2,139 a year ago.

Local merlot production was also down, from 14,332 in 2016 to 13,126 tons in 2017. The price paid per ton of merlot was up slightly, to \$3,387 from \$3,358.

Proctor noted that early in the year some growers thought the chardonnay harvest looked like it might be light. “And then we had that heat wave in September and any chance of any bigger crop got affected.”

Besides chardonnay, other varietals were also down in tonnage, he noted.

It's a trend that growers are planting more cabernet, said Proctor. As a result, "Some of the other varieties are suffering from that."

As for the demand for cabernet, "We're not surprised the price is still strong," Proctor said. "Cabernet has been in demand and that demand has been very strong."

Proctor said he did not think the October fires impacted these numbers.

"Most of the crop was picked. This is about the heat we had in September, not the awful fire we had in October."

Sonoma and Marin counties grape harvests received the second highest return of \$2,803 per ton, up 8.2 percent from 2016.

Statewide, the 2017 crush totaled 4,233,288 tons, up less than half of a percent from the 2016 crush of 4,217,154 tons.

Red wine varieties accounted for the largest share of all grapes crushed, at 2,242,984 tons, down 1.6 percent from 2016.

The 2017 white wine variety crush totaled 1,764,152 tons, up .7 percent from 2016. Tons crushed of raisin-type varieties totaled 94,268, up 4.6 percent from 2016, and tons crushed of table-type varieties totaled 131,884, up 38.2 percent from 2016

The 2017 average price of all varieties was \$775.09, up 1.5 percent from 2016.

#### MORE INFORMATION



2016 Harvest report: Value of Napa County grapes up 28 percent

## Jennifer Huffman

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Jennifer Huffman is the business editor and a general assignment reporter for the Napa Valley Register. I cover a wide variety of topics for the newspaper. I've been with the Register since 2005.

