



NAPA VALLEY GRAPEGROWERS 2020 GROWING SEASON PERSPECTIVE

"Farming is the profession of hope" – Brian Brett

Napa, CA (December 1, 2020) - Napa Valley sets the gold standard for farming. As an established agricultural preserve for over 50 years, the cherished, 30-mile stretch of land is cared for by dedicated grape growers who tend to their vines with careful consideration and innovation. Year-after-year, no matter the challenges, Napa Valley growers' collective goal is to adapt, overcome, then produce high-quality winegrapes, and 2020 was no exception.

This year, Napa Valley growers faced more than the usual share of weather-related challenges, which means the 2020 growing season has been shaped and defined by the ways in which our community banded together—both to ensure the health and vitality of the workforce and to persevere through increasing climate challenges.

Growers recall that conditions were ideal at the start of 2020, with mild temperatures that led to evenly developed clusters. The low winter rainfall resulted in smaller berries with concentrated flavors, then, following an early budbreak and warm summer, harvest kicked off in early August. Growers anticipated the year's heat spells, making trellis adaptations to spread out the canopy, which shaded the fruit during the hottest hours of the day; overhead sprinklers were activated to decrease air temperature, increase humidity, and eliminate risks of dehydration. When harvest began, growers anticipated normal yields and exceptional fruit quality.

Certainly, preparation for harvest looked different this year as grape growers adapted the largely outdoor workforce to COVID-19 safety protocols, training employees on new, rigorous workplace standards. In support, the Napa Valley Grapegrowers (NVG) and Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation (FWF), funded the pilot of a mobile COVID-19 testing van for bi-weekly testing of vineyard crews, provided over 25,000 cloth and N95 masks, issued best practices guidelines for harvesting during a pandemic in English and Spanish, distributed 2,500 health and safety kits to farmworkers, and provided two months of child care through the Boys & Girls Club of Napa Valley.

Amidst the pandemic, the outcome of the vintage was challenged still more when lightning ignited the LNU Complex Fire on August 17, followed shortly thereafter by the Glass Fire on September 27. The wildfires exposed varieties to smoke and ash, influencing harvest operations in both the vineyard and cellar. Grape growers worked closely with wineries on micro-fermentations and berry sampling, testing for specific volatile phenols that are believed to be indicators of smoke taint. Results vary depending on location and, due to lab delays and limitations in scientific certainty, growers and wineries faced an extremely tough decision – whether to harvest their grapes.

For some growers, the prospect of a severely reduced harvest or one where no grapes were harvested was sadly realized. However, the fruit that now matures in barrel remains a testament to Herculean efforts undertaken by Napa Valley growers and farmworkers. While many aspects of this vintage remain unknown, grape growers *do* know that grapevine physiology is wired to respond with

resilience through stressful times. We know that the 2020 vintage will continue to reflect that resilience, and we even have strong reason to hope that the resulting wines will express the promise anticipated by the ideal conditions of the early growing season. With decades of experience, growers have learned to lean on one another, scientists, and researchers for support, and to share innovative ideas and knowledge to produce the highest quality vintage amidst any challenge.

For press inquiries regarding the 2020 growing season and harvest, please email NVG at info@napagrowers.org

About Napa Valley Grapegrowers

NVG is a non-profit trade organization that has played a vital role in strengthening Napa Valley's reputation as a world-class viticultural region for 44 years. Its mission is to preserve and promote Napa Valley's world-class vineyards. NVG represents 726 Napa County grape growers and associated businesses.

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