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Napa Valley Grapegrowers Report

Napa Valley Grapegrowers Report: Napa Valley Farmerworker Foundation celebrates 10 years

Rolando Sanchez
Aug 14, 2021



Rolando Sanchez, center front, volunteering during the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation's annual Napa County Pruning Contest in 2018.

Suzanne Becker Bronk

Rolando Sanchez

The Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation (FWF) is the first organization of its kind in the United States. Since 2011, the foundation has put more than \$6.8 million toward supporting educational and professional development opportunities, reaching more than 22,000 vineyard workers and their families and providing more than 3,000 hours of education.

The diverse curriculum includes English literacy, computer technology for online learning, viticulture and safety, leadership and management, and family-focused programs. The FWF is community-supported, with every dollar raised going directly to its programs and services for farmworkers.

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In this month's Napa Valley Grapegrowers' report, Rolando Sanchez of Walsh Vineyards Management, a long-time supporter, and leader for the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation, tells about the foundation as it celebrates its 10-year milestone.

I am a native "Napkin" and the son of a farmworker. Over the years, my path has brought me to leasing and operating my own vineyards while managing one of Napa's largest local vineyard management companies, where we farm a couple of thousand

acres and support 800 to 1,000 employees annually.

At this scale, a significant part of my job is to always be looking for ways to provide premium farming services at a very value-driven price to some of Napa and Sonoma's largest and most well-known brands. I know from experience that the key to the success of businesses like ours relies on being able to attract, retain, and support the development of highly-skilled employees, who work day in and day out in the ever-challenging and changing landscape of winegrape growing.

In the last 10 years, the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation has played a key role in supporting the people of the wine industry through opening the gateways of access to educational and professional development opportunities to local farmworkers.

The FWF helps individuals, and it also helps us to be better employers; through the FWF, we are able to provide professional development opportunities and foster the growth of leaders within our companies. All of this contributes to making our workforce, community, and businesses more stable, forward-looking, and sustainable.

As growers and vineyard managers, we never really stop thinking about grapes, with the ebbs and flows in the wine industry, growers big and small rely on organizations like the FWF to be nimble and stay connected to the needs of our local community, particularly when facing new or unfamiliar challenges.

The FWF also uniquely stepped in to support farmworkers during the last year and a half of the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization spearheaded a task force to launch a statewide, bilingual COVID-19 health education campaign. In partnership with its sister organization, the Napa Valley Grapegrowers (NVG), they released timely COVID-19 safety protocols for vineyard teams ahead of the busy harvest season.

The FWF also connected with local medical partners to support regular in-the-vineyard COVID testing for crews, and as vaccines became available, the organization provided both monetary and logistical support to ensure that vaccines were made

available early to all of Napa County's vineyard workers; the vast majority of vineyard workers showed up for these vaccines, in part due to the exceptional awareness campaign led by the FWF Task Force.

Of course, there were also the 2020 wildfires. The FWF and NVG once again stepped up to the challenge and assisted the ag community in every aspect, from helping distribute N95 masks, to working with Napa County to help growers gain access to vineyards so that fruit could be harvested before it was compromised, to supporting a wage loss assistance program for farmworkers following disaster.

Every year brings new challenges, and we are lucky to always have the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation in our community's court to prioritize farmworkers and face the challenges of tomorrow.

I invite you to join the FWF community in celebrating 10 years by supporting its continued success at this year's Harvest STOMP and e-Auction event. Cheers!

Support the Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation through the 2021 Harvest STOMP e-Auction, which opens for bidding Thursday, August 19. 100% of all donations go towards their work to provide education and professional development to Napa Valley's vineyard workers.

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