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Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley™ Bring in High Quality Fruit in 2010

Wineries and Growers Work Together to bring in Superior Fruit in Challenging Vintage

HEALDSBURG, CA, November 12, 2010 — “Harvest 2010 marked another quirky and bizarre year,” said WDCV board member Phil Hurst, CEO/Managing Partner of Truett Hurst Winery in Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County. “Yields were down but growers that managed their vineyards through the long cool growing season and intense heat spikes produced grapes of extraordinary quality. Once again, growing extremes were pushed but the resulting wines will be extremely delicious.”

Other vintners and growers within the appellation are echoing a similar sentiment. “We are extremely pleased with what we have in the cellar,” said Erik Miller, owner/winemaker at Kokomo Winery, which focuses on Zinfandel and Cabernet from Dry Creek Valley. “The colors are deep, tannins are big, and we have a beautiful amount of natural acidity. I believe this all adds up to what is going to be a vintage that can be cellared. It was certainly a challenging year for Zinfandel in the vineyard, but we are pleased with the balance on the Zinfandel wines, having great acidity and alcohols that are in check.”

Zinfandel Crop Suffered Losses; Diligent Sorting Brought in Quality Fruit

Overall, Zinfandel grapes were hardest hit by the combination of unusually cool summer weather punctuated by a short but intense heat spike in August that saw temperatures rise to 108 degrees almost overnight. Some dry farmed vineyards on the eastern bench lands lost their entire crop. Others like Pedroncelli Winery lost anywhere from 35-50 percent of their crop. “In order to bring in the best fruit possible, we employed the grape picking crew by the hour rather than by the bucket to comb through the Zinfandel on each vine,” said Julie Pedroncelli St. John, vice president of marketing. “The grape bunches were screened a second time as they were brought to the gondola,” she explained.

Long-time grape grower Paul Bernier farms the Bernier-Sibary vineyard, also on the eastern side of the valley. “Some places got hit hard and others like ours did not,” he said. It was a challenging year with mildew pressure from the generally foggy conditions and possible sunburn from two heat spikes. Bernier believes the elevation of the vineyard kept it out of the mildew stream and may also explain why the grapes did not get sunburned. In addition, quality measures were taken at harvest. “The Sibarys and I made a sorting table right at the bin and sorted all the fruit by hand.”

“This will be a vintage when winemakers shine,” said Brad Longton, winemaker at Fritz Winery. “Our Zinfandel is in the cellar, showing very good quality with typical Dry Creek Valley characteristics of black and red fruit, and spice. The alcohol is about 14 percent.” Debra Mathy, proprietor of Dutcher Crossing Winery, concurs: “Even with the unique trials faced, the 2010 vintage could produce some of the best quality Dry Creek Valley Zinfandels in recent years.”

Stellar Sauvignon Blanc in 2010

Other grape varieties were also affected by the summer weather but to a lesser degree. Hugh Chappelle, winemaker at Quivira Estate Vineyards and Winery called the vintage a “rollercoaster ride,” however he is very pleased with the quality of Quivira’s Dry Creek Valley Fig Tree Sauvignon Blanc. “While we had to do some serious fruit thinning in the field, and further sorting on the crush pad, the quality of flavors and perfect sugar/acid balance bode extremely well for our house style of crisp, refreshing, and under 14 percent alcohol,” he said. Longton is also very pleased with the citrus and topical fruit he is seeing in the Fritz Sauvignon Blanc. “We have great flavors, acidity and balance,” he enthused.

Perfect Fall Ripening Weather for Rhone and Bordeaux Varieties

Overall perfect ripening weather in September and October allowed for extra hang time for the later ripening Rhone and Bordeaux reds. A big storm at the end of October dropped up to 4 inches of rain in some areas, but most of the grapes had been harvested, or were thick-skinned varieties that withstood the moisture. “Everything came in perfectly ripened with great hang time achieved in the month of October,” said St. John of Pedroncelli Winery. “We were glad to finish before the rain.”

Jeremy Kreck, winemaker at Mill Creek explained that the late, brief Indian summer pushed many of the blocks to full maturity. “Our Cabernet was ready to pick before the rain. Extraction for the reds seems good, with dark fruit flavors and slightly above average acid levels.” Similarly Mike Brunson, winemaker/vineyard manager at Michel-Schlumberger, reported that their Cabernet and other Bordeaux varieties were all picked before the storm and are happily fermenting in open top tanks. “The winery is a potpourri of fresh fruit, cocoa powder and CO2. It smells really good in here.”

A Vintage to Remember, or Forget

“2010 will be a year to remember, or forget,” stated Dry Creek Valley grape grower Rick Safford. “Mother Nature tried to hit us with everything she had, but most of us prevailed. The fruit finally ripened and had as much hang time as any winemaker could want. It appears the quality will be good, as long as the vineyard operations and the winemaking were conducted with care. It took more work than a normal year, but I think the quality will end up being worth it.”

“The silver lining in all of this is that we will have the best wine we could make because of our diligence at harvest,” concluded Julie Pedroncelli St. John.

Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley™

The Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley™ (WDCV) is an association of more than 60 wineries and 150 growers, of which most are family-owned and multi-generational, located in Healdsburg, Sonoma County, California. WDCV is dedicated to advancing the recognition, enhancement and preservation of Dry Creek Valley as a premium winegrowing region. Dry Creek Valley is known for its signature varietal Zinfandel and the pristine and unspoiled beauty of the valley. <http://www.wdcv.com>