**President’s Message**

What wonderful bloom weather we just experienced. Nice and warm, good sunshine, and very good fruit set in places I have seen. I started hedging last week, as the vegetative growth has been unbelievable, but I guess I probably say that every year about this time. Our most important powdery mildew control time is upon us, and I know I have been out spraying and keeping a close eye on everything in the vineyard.

As you probably all know by now, we lost a good friend in May. Kurt Lotspeich fought a tough battle against cancer for many months, but the end finally came. Kurt was always a welcome face at the educational and social events of RVWA, and I will miss him. Three stories stand out: One time, many years ago, I was carpooling with Kurt and Dustin and Randy Gold to an event in Grants Pass, and the discussion turned to the fanciful names chemical companies give their products: Rally, Inspire, Chateau, and many others. Randy and Kurt were in the front seat throwing out names one after another, and Dustin and I were in the back laughing so hard our stomachs hurt. Another time Kurt and I were standing around talking about taking care of our vineyards, and he mentioned about how much he appreciated spraying because it gave him an opportunity to survey the whole vineyard in a very short period of time. So every time since then, as I drive around spraying and checking out everything, I always remember Kurt and what he said about what a good opportunity it is. Finally, I want to recall a time when Kurt took Shari and me to his wine storage room and we all tasted different batches of wine he was making. His wines were so good, and as an amateur winemaker myself, I really appreciated his generosity and his skill. He was a good man. I will miss him.

We will have our annual vineyard tour and (FREE)picnic on July 28 this year. The program committee has a special theme, and we will have some of the OWRI personnel down from Corvallis to accompany us on our tour—SEE BELOW. The hiring panel has concluded its work, and OSU has made an offer to the leading candidate for the viticulture specialist at SOREC. Everybody is very hopeful that the person will be on the job before harvest begins. I have been trying to add material to the website as it becomes available. Greg Jones’ climate report came out after our Newsletter in May so it was posted on the website.

Well, I know you are all busy at this time of year trying to keep up with the rampant growth in your vineyards. Looks like another early year, about on par with 2015, and I hope you are able to stay ahead of those pesky vines. Paz—John

**Upcoming Events**

Wine Marketing Roundtable

Where: Del Rio Vineyards, 52 North River Road, Gold Hill

When: Monday, June 20, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Program: “Welcome &amp; An Overview of Del Rio.” Lindsey Zagar/Courtney Thomas,

Del Rio Vineyards

“Video Platforms: YouTube, Snapchat, Vine, Periscope, and More.” Maureen Battistella, Southern Oregon University

“Dazzling Wine Club Events,” Steven Addington, RoxyAnn Winery

“Making the Right Distribution Decision.” Erika Balbier/Deanna Eames, Summit Beverage

“Working Well with Wine Tour Companies,” Tracy Hurst, Bravo Outings; Brad Niva, Wine Hopper Tours

GROUP DISCUSSION: “Tips for Handling Grumpy Customers,” Marilyn Hawkins, Hawkins &; Company PR

Roundtable Schedule

Mondays, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

July 18 Pallet Wine Company (and The Urban Cork), 3rd & Fir, Medford

August 8 Schmidt Family Vineyards, 330 Kubli Road, Grants Pass

Sept-Oct HARVEST (we hope)

Nov. 14 EdenVale Winery, 2310 Voorhies Road, Medford

Dec. 12 RoxyAnn Winery, 3285 Hillcrest Road, Medford

**CONTACT:** Marilyn Hawkins, Hawkins & Company PR, mhawkins@prhawk.com

 (541) 552-9922

RVWA Annual Vineyard Tour

Where: Exact starting location TBD

When: July 28, starting 8am

Program: **Replanting virus infected blocks and the strategies involved**. We'll tour DeBoer, Roxy Ann and Fortmiller vineyards and look at issues such as virus proximity, replanting/establishment strategies, sourcing of plant material, rogueing and water/fertilization regimes.

RVWA Annual Picnic

Where: Del Rio Vineyards

When: Thursday, July 28, 5 pm

Sponsors: Ewing Irrigation and Pape’ Equipment (Including vineyard equipment on site)

Cost: Free, for the first two members of an RVWA Membership. $15 per person for more than two.

Please bring a bottle of wine to share.

**Greg Jones Climate Report**

**Weather and Climate Summary and Forecast**

**Summer 2016**

Gregory V. Jones

Southern Oregon University

**June 6, 2016**

 May 2016 continued the warm trend for portions of the west, while providing some relief for others. The month ended up warmer than average from northern California throughout much of Oregon, Washington and Idaho where temperatures 2-5°F above normal were observed (Figure 1). Central to Southern California and into the Great Basin and the desert SW were average to cooler than average largely due to cloud cover and moisture that has lingered from the fading El Niño in the tropical Pacific. In terms of precipitation, most of the coastal to intermountain valleys in California, Oregon and Washington all remained dry, while much of the Sierra Nevada mountains and portions of the desert SW into the Rockies were much wetter than normal (Figure 1). For the rest of the US, Texas and much of the southeast were much wetter than average in May, while much of the eastern third of the country was near normal to drier than normal (not shown). Temperatures across the rest of the US in May were largely normal to slightly cooler than normal with the exception of the PNW, Great Lakes and northern New England which were warmer than normal (not shown).

 **Figure 1** – Western US May 2016 temperature departure from normal (left) and percent of normal precipitation (right; images from WestWide Drought Tracker, Western Region Climate Center; University of Idaho).

Cumulative conditions since the first of the year continue to show a largely warmer than normal western US with precipitation amounts mixed (Figure 2). Average temperatures for the period have run 1-4°F or more above the 1981-2010 climate normals for much of California, Oregon, Idaho and Washington. While portions of Montana and the Dakotas have been up to 6°F above normal, areas in eastern Nevada and the Four Corners have been closer to normal for the year to date. This pattern continues across the entire US, with temperatures running 1-3°F above normal in most regions but 5°F or more above normal in the northern Rockies and Plains states (not shown). For 2016 precipitation amounts have been 90 to 150% of normal from Northern California across to Nevada and into much of the Washington and the Rockies (Figure 2). Dry conditions have been seen across eastern Oregon into Idaho and eastern Montana along with Southern California and across the southwest. The wetter than average conditions extends out of the northern Rockies and into the Great Plains then south into the Gulf Coast states, while portions of the eastern US have been drier than average so far this year (not shown).

**Figure 2** – Western US year to date (January through May 2016) temperature departure from normal (left) and percent of normal precipitation (right; images from WestWide Drought Tracker, Western Region Climate Center; University of Idaho).

Following the general spatial temperature patterns in Figure 1 and 2, growing degree-days are higher than normal over most of the western portions of California, Oregon, and Washington (Figure 3; new data from the CIRC). March through May accumulations are running 100-200 units higher than the 1981-2010 normals throughout much of the western wine regions, with the exception of a portion of the North Coast and south-central coast in California. GDD accumulations are running roughly 15-25 days ahead of average and continue to outpace the last two warm years (2014 and 2015) (see the Appendix Figure 1 for four locations in Oregon).

**Figure 3** – Western US March through May 2016 growing degree-days departure from the 1981-2010 normals (image from WestWide Drought Tracker, Western Region Climate Center; University of Idaho).

**Drought Watch** – western US drought conditions have lessened in some areas from the extremes of the last few years. However, conditions have not changed much since the first of the year with central and southern California and into the southwest and Great Basin continuing to be very dry (Figure 4). The US seasonal drought outlook forecasts that the driest regions in Arizona, California and Nevada will likely persist through the end of August and beyond, while drought development is likely into eastern Oregon and much of Washington.

**El Niño Watch** – El Niño conditions are essentially over in the tropical Pacific with cool surface waters emerging across the equator toward the central Pacific. Prediction models are in agreement that this El Niño will continue to weaken and that La Niña development is extremely likely by fall. However, even with this weakening we have seen some lingering El Niño effects in the western US with more cloud cover and higher humidity levels in the southwestern US and into the Great Basin. If the transition into La Niña conditions by fall materializes, the western US would likely experience a colder and snowier winter. I will monitor this over coming months as there is some lead time forecasting that can come from knowing the combined conditions in the tropics and north Pacific (see below).

**North Pacific Watch** – Warmer than average sea surface temperatures (SST) along the west coast in the North Pacific continue (Figure 4), but the magnitude and spatial extent of the warm waters continue to decline from the conditions seen during 2012-2015. The cooler than average conditions out over the central North Pacific also extends further east and covers a greater area than the last few years. The warmer coastal waters along the west coast should help bolster a warmer than average growing season, especially higher minimum temperatures, but the cooler pool of water might be indicative of a slowing of this effect. Long range forecasts are typically driven by conditions in the North Pacific and the state of El Niño in the tropics. If we continue to see a shift to cooler waters in the North Pacific AND the tropics continue to transition to La Niña, the western US will likely shift into a cooler regime, especially into the fall and winter. As such I will monitor how it evolves over the next few months.

**Forecast Periods:**

**6-10 Day:** The short term forecast points to a cool down in the west from the record breaking high temperatures of the last week. A break down in the ridge should allow for on shore flow and one or two frontal passages out of the Gulf of Alaska. The result is that temperatures during this period are forecast to be cooler than normal across the PNW, but warmer than normal in most of California and across through most of the eastern half of the country. The precipitation forecast for this period shows an above normal likelihood across the PNW and into the northern Rockies. California and into the southwest is forecast to see normal to drier than normal conditions during this period.

**8-14 Day:** Similar to the 6-10 day forecast with the overall pattern dominated by a cool down in the PNW and warmer than average conditions throughout California and the vast majority of the rest of the country. Precipitation forecasts into the middle of June tilt the odds to a slightly wetter than normal northern Oregon and western Washington, while northern California, the Great Basin and the Rockies are forecast to see drier than average conditions.

**30 Day:** Once the short term cool down ends mid-month (see above), the forecast through the rest of the month of June calls for warmer than average conditions through the western US with the PNW having the greatest chance of much warmer than average conditions. Precipitation during June is forecasted to have an equal chance to be slightly above average, normal, or slightly below average (in other words no evidence for the dynamics needed to drive summer precipitation at this point).

**90 Day:** The June-July-August (JJA) forecast continues the 30 day June forecast as given above. Most of the continental United States is facing elevated chances of well above average summer temperatures, according to the latest outlook from NOAA’s Climate Prediction Center (see Appendix Figure 2). There are no substantial changes to the pattern in the western US with everywhere in California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho expected to see higher than normal temperatures. Like the temperature forecast, the precipitation forecast for the west does not change much from the June outlook, with the west forecasted to have an equal chance to be slightly above average, normal, or slightly below average. Precipitation occurrence and accumulation over the next three months will be driven by increasing chances of warm season thunderstorms which are typically quite spotty, so amounts received will vary tremendously.

**Winemakers Fight to Save Some of Oregon’s Most Coveted Wine**

Tad Seestedt knows a winemaker only gets about 40 chances in his career to perfect his craft. Each year, he gets one shot with the grapes he grew or bought.

It seems those odds just weren't long enough. Seestedt's company, [Ransom Wine](http://www.ransomspirits.com/index.php), relies on one of the riskiest business models in the wine industry. He is constantly one insect away from losing at least one of his shots.

He sources all his grapes from vines that are the most susceptible to phylloxera, a pervasive pest that plagues Oregon vineyards. The nearly-microscopic yellow louse lives at the bottom of a vine and chomps on the roots and leaves, eventually cutting off nutrients and water to the plant. Death comes sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, but once phylloxera gains a foothold, it's nearly impossible to stop.

If the pest takes hold in one of the fields Seestedt buys grapes from, his business could be significantly hurt. But, it's worth it, he thinks, for the taste of vines grown on their own roots.

"The vineyards that I always found to be my favorites and to make the best wine are from vines that are on their own roots," Seestedt said.

In Oregon, when people talk about vines grown on their own roots they mean old vines. Nearly all the grape vines planted since the late 1980s are grafted onto a few types of rootstock that are supposed to be phylloxera resistant. Those grapes now make up most of the state's wine.

Phylloxera isn't enough of a problem that it threatens Oregon's burgeoning wine country. Like most wine-growing regions, the state is already beginning to adapt to the pest. The issue is, instead, in the drinking experience.

There is no scientific evidence that you can taste a difference between grafted grapes and grapes grown on their own roots. A Washington State University studied the question for its own wine region, which is still largely free of phylloxera, and concluded that climate, soil and vintage are the main taste factors.

But, many farmers and connoisseurs contend you can taste a difference between new roots and old.

**Living on borrowed time**

When Seestedt started his first winemaking gig in the early 1990s, the winery was making a blended red wine that used grapes from farmer Bill Cattrall. They quickly became Seestedt's favorite, but he could rarely convince the winery owner to let him create a single-estate bottle to show them off.

When Seestedt set out on his own, he approached Cattrall, and now bottles several reds and whites using the grapes.

Just outside of Amity, Cattrall's vineyard is an island of grapes surrounded by grass seed or other food crops. That isolation is why he thinks he's been phylloxera-free for 43 years.

"I'm just living on borrowed time, I suppose, when you look at the amount of phylloxera out there," Cattrall said. "But we're trying to be careful."

When Cattrall planted his first seven rows of vines in 1973, he wasn't quite sure his plan would pan out. He had developed a taste for wine while stationed in northern Italy during a stint in the U.S. Army. His farm is the same latitude and climate as that region, and when he returned home, vineyards were becoming more popular in Oregon.

Phylloxera is a longtime pest of wine grape-growing regions like California and France. No one has figured out a way to defeat phylloxera other than to splice the vines of one plant onto the rootstock of one that phylloxera can't feed on -- an agricultural practice called grafting. There are a few types of American grape roots that phylloxera can't kill, so vineyard farmers take a cutting of pinot noir or chardonnay and attach it to the root. Eventually, the plants grow together, so the roots move nutrients and water between the vines and the soil.

The louse only entered Oregon in the late 1980s, coinciding with the beginning of Oregon's winery boom.

By the time phylloxera had a foothold in three different Oregon vineyards in 1990, Cattrall had 8.5 acres worth of vines in the ground and ripping them out would be costly.

"So we figured we'd wait until the time comes," Cattrall said. "We're still waiting."

Seestedt washes his truck's tires when he drives onto the farm and Cattrall asks people to wash their boots. When he recently planted a half-acre of muscat grapes, he used clones of his own plants, rather than import foreign ones into his field.

"As long as I can keep it in-house, I think I'm good," Cattrall said.

**Vines under siege**

[Joe Dobbes](http://dobbesfamilyestate.com/) bought his Perrydale vineyard in 2006 because it was a good price. The grass growers who planted it in the late 1990s and maintained it for years had done a poor job, but the winemaker saw potential. It's spread over two hills in the Van Duzer corridor of the Willamette Valley, where ocean breezes turn into gusts as they are funneled through the hills. A creek runs between the two slopes of the vineyard, making a valley to separate the fields.

The 214 acres only produced at most 400 tons of fruit when he first bought it. Now they are getting 800 tons.

On a sunny May afternoon, a tractor puts over a barren 13-acre hillside, preparing it for replanting.

Dobbes ripped the vines from this plot last year -- about five years after he noticed the first signs of phylloxera.

He spends a lot of time in the fields, trying to learn as much about the growing process as possible to inform how he handles the fruit in his winery. In 2010, he was inspecting that year's green shoots, wrapped around the wires that hold mature vines in place. They were green and yellow, looking wilty instead of thriving in the spring sun.

He sent samples of the vines to a lab, but they came back phylloxera-free. Dobbes was relieved, but skeptical.

The discoloration spread and the vines retreated into themselves. A second round of tests revealed the pest at the roots of the vines. By this time, the rest of the vineyard was infiltrated.

Dobbes tried to hold the bugs off as long as he could, and started budgeting. Replanting a vineyard means that you not only lose the fruit from those vines, but you must buy grapes elsewhere to replace them. It's costly.

"Like anything, you have to pay more now to keep the costs down later," Dobbes said.

**Timeline speeds up**

Their costs might increase faster than planned.

On that May afternoon, Dobbes drove through the fields pointing out the roots that stick out for not having long brown vines that are starting to spurt green leaves. Then, he drove across the road to his other fields and everyone in his car gasped. These vineyards weren't slated for replacement for years, but there are spots where not a single plant is growing anymore.

Dobbes will likely take out about 25 acres this year. He doesn't know how his vineyard became infested, but the past two years produced remarkably high yields throughout the Willamette Valley due to the early summers and consistent temperatures during the growing season.

This year is on track to have similar weather. That's good for business, but could be bad for plants, which need to rest, like an exhausted person fighting a cold.

Still, tending vines on their own roots is worth the gamble.

"The old vines have wisdom," Dobbes said. "There aren't old grafted vines in Oregon."

-- Molly Harbarger

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