President’s Message

Well, we can all sigh a deep breath of relief now that harvest is done. And what a nice October it was! Aside from a couple of days of rain, we had a nice warm October to get all those late ripening varieties just right. I know the smoky skies of August and early September were very dreary and terrible, but I actually think that for some varieties it might have been helpful to delay ripening for a few weeks. I thought the slower process allowed for more flavor compounds to develop rather than just letting the sugar dominate. I didn’t harvest any grapes in September, but October was fast and furious. I am very grateful for a bountiful harvest and a whole new list of customers who bought grapes.

I have always been impressed with the helpful winegrowing community here in southern Oregon, and this year I was the beneficiary of exactly this kind of assistance. I don’t want to get him in trouble for being so generous, so I won’t name him, but one of my neighbors who has a nice big loading yard allowed me to stage all my bins for a 44 bin shipment in his yard and use his forklift for the final loading at 3am onto a truck headed north. When he heard I had a few extra tons of Zinfandel to sell because of unplanned extra production, he helped me find a contact who was interested in buying them. This is the kind of generous cooperation that makes our area so special.

Like many of you, I have been afflicted by a widespread GRBaV infection in my vineyard. While I rogued out a large number of plants last winter, I realized this year that I need to be more aggressive and try to rid my vineyard of the virus. I started working with the USDA to apply for TAP funds last year, but I was too late to get all the inspections done before leaf-fall. I kept my application alive this year and made sure to get all the inspections done. Even though the TAP funds do not pay for all the cost of ripping out and replacing vines, they do help. Obviously, the biggest financial problem is the loss of income while the vines are out of production. Ripping out mature vines is never fun, but as I have started this fall, and I see the red stained leaves on plants I am removing, I have come to realize a satisfaction in cleaning the disease out. Now I just have to make sure to purchase clean new plant material and be vigilant to prevent any reoccurrence.

One of our best educational events of the year is coming up, the end of season, post-harvest wrap up. We will have this event on November 14 from 2-5 pm, at 2 Hawk Winery. (My mistake in the last issue located it at Dancin) We will have a panel of speakers (details below) to discuss issues of our current growing year. Please bring a little wine to share if you are so inclined, as we will have time for socializing after the discussion.

I had foot surgery (again) Thursday, and so I’m laid up here in the house with my foot up, enjoying the rain and realizing I have nothing urgent on my calendar. I hope you too are enjoying this time of year when we can savor our harvest, reflect on the year, and prepare for family time and the holidays. Paz—John



**Upcoming Events**

End of Season Wrap-up

Where: 2Hawk Vineyard & Winery, 2335 N Phoenix Rd, Medford, OR 97504

When: November 14, 2-5pm

Speakers:

Review of 2017 weather

Ryan Sandler, Meteorologist, NWS Medford

Winemaker Panel

Heather Nenow, Winemaker, Belle Fiore Winery

Kiley Evans, Winemaker, 2 Hawk Vineyard & Winery

Chris Graves, Winemaker, Naumes Crush & Fermentation

Oregon Wine Symposium

Learn, connect and grow at the Oregon Wine Symposium, the premier educational event and trade show for the Northwest wine community. The Symposium is comprised of two full days of panel discussions and presentations covering the most relevant topics in viticulture, enology and wine business. Presented by the wine industry’s leading experts, the Symposium is a must-attend event for winery and vineyard owners, vineyard managers, winemakers, marketing and sales managers and winery staff. Registration includes access to the Northwest’s biggest wine industry trade show, featuring more than 170 exhibitors.

**What**: Oregon Wine Symposium

**When**: Tuesday, February 20, 2018 8:00 AM - Wednesday, February 21, 2018 5:00 PM

**Where:** Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Portland, Oregon 97232, USA. Registration & Cost: $20-$240. **OWA members receive a discount on registration.**

**Who Attends:** winery and vineyard owners, vineyard managers, winemakers, marketing and sales managers and winery staff.

**Grape Tonnage Tax Reminder**

Some in our wine community may not be aware that Oregon law, specifically Oregon Revised Statute 473.045, authorizes taxes in the amount of $12.50 per ton on wine grapes sold to any winery not licensed under ORS chapter 471**, including wineries in other states**. Grape tax funds are used by the Oregon Wine Board for marketing, education and research programs. Payments by growers and wineries, supplemented by new funding streams, are allowing the Wine Board to significantly expand and enrich its assortment of scientific research projects based on recommendations from the industry’s statewide Research Committees.

 Under current law, grape sellers are to report all sales on a [form](http://www.oregon.gov/olcc/docs/privilege_tax/oregon_wine_board_tax_report_12_11.pdf?utm_source=Grapevine+List&utm_campaign=ed9094cc86-Grapevine_Newsletter_Sept_26_2017&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bd8f01fe5e-ed9094cc86-) provided by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC). Column E is reserved for the required reporting of vinifera or hybrid grapes sold out of state.

 The statute also requires vineyard owners that sell grapes **out of state** to retain harvest and sales records for inspection or audit by the OLCC. A grower failing to report sales to the OLCC, and/or failing to satisfy the corresponding tax liability, is subject to charge with a Class C Misdemeanor and a fine of up to $1,000, plus interest of 5% on any late tax payments for the first month and 1% for each subsequent month.

Smoke Tainted Fruit in CA

By Esther Mobley, SF Chronicle

The Bucklin family’s relationship with Constellation Brands stretches back more than three decades. That’s how long Constellation — a global wine corporation expected to generate $7.33 billion in revenue this year, and owner of California wine brands like Robert Mondavi and Ravenswood — has bought grapes from Old Hill Ranch, the Bucklins’ 35-acre Sonoma Valley vineyard. But after this year’s wildfires, for the first time ever, Constellation rejected the Old Hill fruit.

The reason? Smoke taint.

Throughout Wine Country, as the harrowing 2017 harvest nears its end, small-scale growers like Bucklin are facing a harsh reality: Wineries may not be willing to buy their product because they don’t want to sell smoke-tainted wines to consumers. When that happens, it’s largely not the wineries that take the hit, but the growers.

During the earliest hours of the Nuns Fire, flames ripped through Old Hill Ranch, decimating two homes on the property, knocking over more than 40 trees and scorching several century-old vines. Most of Old Hill’s grapes had been harvested already, but some — including the parcels contracted to Constellation — remained on the vines. For days, thick smoke lingered.

Constellation’s smoke-testing process takes on a scientific approach, according to vineyard owner Will Bucklin, looking for the presence of the chemical compounds guaiacol and 4-methylguaiacol, which contribute smoky aromas and flavors.

“They tested the grapes before they were set to pick and found the compounds present,” Bucklin said. “And they rejected the grapes based on that.”

Bucklin does not have crop insurance, which would probably have helped recoup some of his financial losses because of the smoke, on Old Hill Ranch, originally planted in 1852. He’s planning to get insurance now.

To help soften the blow, Bucklin decided to make Constellation’s rejected fruit into wine himself (in addition to farming the vineyard, he owns a small, eponymous wine brand), though he’s not sure whether he’ll be able to sell it as wine, either bottled or in bulk. Some Cabernet Sauvignon is tasting good, but one of his lots — an Alicante Bouschet grape variety — is already, as he put it, “nasty.”

In Napa Valley, grower Maria Haug is waiting to see whether the last of her fruit, some Roussanne grapes, will be rejected.

“We’re just hoping the numbers come in low,” Haug, who with her husband, Rene, farms a 7½-acre vineyard in Rutherford, said of the pending smoke-taint analysis. About 90 percent of the Haugs’ grapes had been picked before the wildfires; the final 5 tons of Roussanne were picked Oct. 26. The day before that pick, the winery client (whom Haug did not name) made Haug sign a contract saying that if the grapes tested positive for high levels of the smoke taint compounds, the winery would not have to pay Haug for the fruit.

If the winery does reject the fruit, Haug will take the grapes, vinify them at a custom-crush facility and attempt to sell the wine on the bulk market. “But we don’t make money that way, we just cut our losses,” she said.

Custom-crush fees come to about $1,000 per ton, she added, plus the costs of pruning, picking and farming; she estimates she might get $1,000 to $1,200 per ton on the bulk market. The Napa County average price of Roussanne, meanwhile — the price the winery would pay her — was $4,250 per ton last year.

What, precisely, is smoke taint, and how can grapes be tested for it?

“There’s a lot of confusion on the topic, and not a lot of research has been done,” said Robert Tracy, owner of BevTrac Mobile Quality Systems, a Windsor company that provides quality assurance consulting services to the wine industry. “What happens is that when smoke is produced from fire, there are lots of volatile compounds that get in the atmosphere, and there’s probably eight that could then get into grapes.”

Of those eight compounds, two — guaiacol and 4-methyl-guaiacol — are considered the main smoke taint culprits, and can be tested for. Both can occur in wines normally. They help contribute Syrah’s signature smoky aroma, for example, and often appear in high concentrations in wines that have been aged in toasted oak barrels.

When smoke lingers, guaiacol and 4-methylguaiacol can penetrate grape skins. “They actually stay in the skin primarily, and sometimes in the pulp,” Tracy said. However, those volatile compounds can bind to the sugars in the grapes, rendering them nonvolatile. Volatile compounds can be smelled; nonvolatile ones can’t.

According to Tracy, most laboratories can test only for free guaiacol and 4-methyl-guaiacol. But if the compounds are bound and therefore nonvolatile, neither a laboratory test nor a human nose will detect it. More complications can ensue, because bound compounds can get released later, especially during fermentation.

“That’s why you can have low levels of the compounds at the juice stage, but higher levels at the wine stage, because the bond between the sugar and the smoke taint chemical is broken,” Tracy said. Glucosidase enzymes that break those bonds, he added, are present in the human mouth, so it’s possible that smoke taint compounds can be freed by the act of tasting.

In other words, there may be no way of telling how much smoke taint will appear in a wine down the road.

To make matters more confusing, no standard definition exists for what constitutes too much guaiacol and 4-methyl-guaiacol in grapes, and when a winery shouldn’t make wine from them. Multiple winemakers cited 0.5 parts per billion as the safe threshold, but Haug believes her winery client will not reject her Roussanne if it tests under 23 parts per billion. (White wines, theoretically, should be at a lower risk of showing smoke taint than reds, because the juice typically spends little time exposed to grape skins.)

For Will Bucklin, the fate of the rejected Constellation grapes is unclear. Maybe he’ll sell the wines on the bulk market — though he doubts that even the bulk market would accept smoke-tainted Alicante Bouschet. Maybe he’ll apply techniques like reverse osmosis, which has been shown to potentially reduce smoke taint, though he’d consider that a last resort.

Maybe the wines will turn out just fine.

“I really, strongly feel that I want there to be some character about the fire in the wines,” Bucklin said. “This is part of the vintage, and it’s going to be a part of my life, remembering this event. In 10 years, if I sit down and have a bottle of that smoky Cabernet, I want to remember the vintage.

“At the same time,” he said, “I don’t want the wines to be disgusting.”

Maria Haug, meanwhile, counts her blessings. Her family has been farming its vineyard since the 1940s, and in her lifetime she remembers only two vintages — one in the early 1970s, the other 2011 — where the family had to take a loss on contracted fruit.

“It’s farming, and farming is always a gamble,” Haug said. “I think a lot of people that are new to the industry may not remember that Napa Valley has had an awful lot of good years.”

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