



Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains

The Grapevine

April, 2010

VINE TALK

Spring 2010. Bud break has occurred and shoots are fast elongating on the vines. Tiny clusters appear with the promise of fruit if all goes well. There are many adventures for that tiny bud between now and fruit set and then harvest. This is the time to care well for them so that each cluster may reach its full potential on the vine and in the bottle.

The most important task at hand is to establish and follow through with a sound powdery mildew prevention program. Mildew is the number one fungal threat to grapes and most vineyards will not properly mature to sound fruit without canopy management and consistent applications of fungicide sprays.

The first defense against mildew is a sound canopy management program. The key is to allow the canopy to fill to capacity while still allowing for stippled light and fresh air to move freely within the foliage. This practice promotes a healthy microclimate within the canopy that is naturally resistant to disease because it reduces disease habitat.

Next is the spray program. Fortunately there are many options available early in the season. JMS Stylet Oil is a proven leader in the early protection of grape vines against mildew and other pathogens. Start early and be consistent with the spray, being sure to spray often enough to keep up with coverage for the fast expanding tissue. Stylet Oil is easy to use, carries a caution label, and can be mixed with many nutrients (pre mix a blend in a jar first to be sure for compatibility before going ahead with the tank mix). It is available as an OMRI certified organic product. It has no significant odor and is somewhat able to withstand wet conditions. There are other organic oils coming on the market that may provide excellent protection as well. Wettable sulfur is a cheaper alternative in low pressure situations. Sulfur acts as a preventative spray and will not eradicate existing populations of powdery mildew the way most oils will. Sulfur and Stylet oil cannot be used within several weeks of each other. If you choose one and switch to the other you will need to use interval sprays like Armicarb, Copper, Regalia, Sonata, etc. There are many organic products now available that are very effective if applied consistently.
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Next Meeting

Soil Fertility
May 4, 2:00pm at Silver Mountain

Our speaker: Amigo Bob Cantisano, on soil fertility, including soil nutrients and microbes, composting, etc. Amigo Bob is head of Organic Ag Advisers, and a co-founder of the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). He consults to vineyards and a wide range of farms, and has advised the World Bank and the government of Costa Rica. We contacted Amigo Bob in response to several requests for a program to include composting. He will talk about composting as part of the larger issue of soil fertility. Whether or not you are growing or are interested in growing organically, his talk on soil fertility should be very valuable.

From a 2009 article about Amigo Bob in Wines & Vines: "Soil management is primary in my mind. The healthier a soil becomes, with regard to ecological stability and biological diversity, the less problems with growing the crop--including less problems with fertility, pests, diseases, weeds, water availability and weather hardiness." (*This article is linked from our website at www.vascm.org and you can read it in its entirety.*)
Directions to Silver Mountain on the back)

Coming up: program on the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance's Sustainability Certification

President's Corner:

The VASCM has been working with the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) since early 2004, when we did our first self-assessment program at Bargetto Winery. Since then, we have worked with the CSWA on an almost yearly basis on additional self-assessments and other programs promoting sustainability, including integrated pest management (twice), ecosystem management, energy efficiency, and water quality and conservation. Earlier this year the CSWA announced its new statewide Sustainability Certification program, a voluntary program

(Vine Talk, continued)

Whatever your program the important part is to establish one and follow through with it regularly as the tissue expands. Even the systemic products that allow for longer spray intervals like Flint, Elite, Pristine, etc. have only limited or no ability to move through the tissue. Make sure to keep new tissue and flower buds protected as they develop and expand. These are the most vulnerable parts of the vine.

Remember, almost every vineyard looks perfect this time of year. The fresh new tissue emerging in the morning sun can be very seductive and lull you into a sense of complacency. Mildew spores can over winter under the bark and in the crevices of the buds. Left unchecked these spores will rapidly repopulate in warm weather. Prior to bloom and set it is often difficult to detect early infection. There is rarely the white powder so obvious later in the season. Be aware that within the perfect dream of the early growth the spores are awakening as well. Have a spray program and follow through it before the problem explodes in mid summer and destroys your crop.

There are a few new nasty pests out there as well. The European Grapevine Moth (*Lobesia botrana*) is quite a threat in Napa. Larry Bettiga, our own UC Extension agent, is an excellent resource for more information. The county is placing traps around many vineyards. Please support their efforts to identify hot spots for this pest. In addition, consider enhancing your property by introducing plants that provide beneficial habitat to good insects. Increasing the biodiversity of your site may increase opportunities for attracting beneficial insects that may be able to combat early invasions of pests.

Take a walk through our vineyard. Inspect the winter pruning and make adjustments by nipping off double shoots that emerge out of a single bud and clipping off spurs that are crossing or crowding others. Make note of areas that are vigorous or struggling. Note things that look different and flag them with marking tape. Flag new gopher activity and deal with it immediately.

There is still time to get compost on the ground underneath the vines. I like to spread the mature compost first and then mow the cover crop over it. Disking is an option if you want to encourage vigor. Maintaining a ground cover is better for the soil and will help reduce vigor in the vines if that is an issue.



April and early May are important times to incorporate micronutrients into your vineyard system. Healthy bud and fruit formation demands zinc and boron. Check over last year's petiole sample results to determine need in your vineyard. There are several micro-nutrients that play a small

but significant role in the production of premium fruit. If you don't have any nutrient history be sure to take tissue samples at bloom this year to better understand your site.

It's a beautiful spring and a time of great promise. The vines have awakened, shoots are eagerly elongating, and tiny flower buds are emerging with goals for a new vintage. Check in with your winemaker, taste last years product, and plan for the season to come.

Buena suerte!

Prudy Foxx
Foxx Viticulture
Santa Cruz Mountains

Copies of all of Prudy's Vine Talk columns since 2004 can be found on our website at www.vascm.org.

(President's Corner, cont. from page one)

based on the self-assessments you have been doing. The CCSW-Certified program provides verification that a vineyard or winery adopts and implements sustainable winegrowing practices according to the industry's code of best practices and commits to a "process of continuous improvement" in these practices. Self-assessment is the first step to obtaining certification. In our area, I am aware that so far Cooper-Garrod and Clos la Chance have received CCSW certification.

We are planning a presentation by the CSWA to give us an overview of this new certification program, along with an opportunity to update your self-assessment – or do it for the first time if you haven't done it before.

Many of our current 'best vineyard practices' are considered sustainable. They improve fruit quality and your operations, and can reduce costs. As well, 'sustainable', 'organic' and 'biodynamic' have become marketing strengths. The CSWA, working with vineyards and wineries throughout the state, has created a program to more closely qualify what constitutes 'sustainable vineyard practices' through this certification program. I hope you will come to hear more about it. You can find a Q&A about it posted to the homepage of our website at www.vascm.org. And stay tuned for the details about the program.

Here is to an excellent 2010 vintage.

Mary Lindsay
President, VASCM

Vineyard Profile: Big Basin Vineyards

- by Suzanne Purnell

I swirled the wine around inside my mouth, took the first swallow, turned to owner/winemaker Bradley Brown and said, "Wow!" If I was one of those wine writers who wax poetic with strings of words to describe wine, I would do it here, but let's just say Big Basin Vineyards' 2008 Coastview Vineyard Syrah is mighty fine wine. WOW!

Proprietor and Winemaker, Bradley Brown. Born and raised in upstate New York, Bradley has been around wine most of his life, starting with memories of his father making wine at home. As a young adult, Bradley moved to California, worked in Silicon Valley and transitioned from his business development career with Check Point Software to full-time vineyard proprietor and winemaker while still in his mid-30s.

Around this same time (late 1990s), he fell in love...with Syrah...and he fell hard. From his love affair with Syrah, Bradley set a goal to produce extraordinary, world-class Syrah wine.



Estate Vineyard. Situated on 150 acres, geographically dead-center in the Santa Cruz Mountains Appellation, Big Basin Vineyards currently has 10 acres of organically-grown Syrah, Grenache and Roussanne vines. It is the only vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains planted exclusively to Rhone-varietals. The vineyards are planted on ridge tops and fairly steep hillsides that soak up sunshine from their southward orientations.

While a relatively young vineyard (the Syrah was planted in 2000), the site has an early history with grapevines. At the turn of the century (early 1900s), the acreage was homesteaded by French pioneers, who planted orchards and vineyards where the redwoods had been recently clear cut. By the time Bradley purchased the property in 1998, old redwood grape stakes were the only artifacts of the vineyard's past.

Bradley turned to John Alban of Edna Valley, one of the original Rhone Rangers, for expertise and mentoring. John was a consultant for rootstocks, vine spacing and trellis systems. He provided field selections, with an eye on pedigree for the best wine.

The vineyard was ripped before planting and 10 tons of lime and 10 yards of organic compost were added per acre. To control erosion on the hillsides, extensive drainage systems were installed including surface and tile

drains, and cover crop was planted. The 10 miles of rows are never plowed, only mowed using weed eaters under the vines—an arduous task on these hillsides.

Viticulture Practices. Bradley believes that wine is largely made in the vineyard and he must grow great grapes to make a great wine. To that end, he incorporates diligent, organic and sustainable viticulture practices that produce low yields of high-quality fruit. He also believes organic viticulture will help promote the indigenous yeasts that he relies on for fermentation, and he strongly believes those yeasts enhance the quality of his wines.

Bradley prunes, shoot thins for a balanced canopy, trains vertically and leaf pulls to allow access for morning and afternoon sun and improved airflow. He hedges, and fruit thins for one cluster of “perfect” grapes per shoot at harvest. He uses organic sprays to control powdery mildew.

Future plans include applying for organic certification later this year, use of spray organic teas, miniature sheep to graze the cover crops between rows and solar power.

The Wine. Equally diligent in his winemaking, Bradley employs some equipment not usually found in most wineries. One is an ozone generator to sanitize the winery; another is a high-powered microscope to scrutinize the wine as it develops (especially important relying on native yeast fermentation to assure that dangerous yeast colonies that will ruin the wine don't take over the fermentation).

Employing a Davis-trained assistant winemaker, who had to learn many new techniques such as native yeasts fermentations, the vineyard buys enough extra fruit to produce close to 2,300 cases of wine. To pass muster, the suppliers must offer an outstanding vineyard site, viticulture to a high standard, super clean, “perfect” fruit and Bradley determines the pick date.

At harvest, the fruit is sorted, de-stemmed, but not crushed, and whole berry fermented after cold soaking. Sound, clean fruit promotes better native yeast fermentations and is in keeping with Bradley's diligence to flavor, so the destemmed berries drop onto a berry shaker table where raisins, oxidized juice, earwigs, shot berries and other undesirable MOG (material other than grape) is sorted out. The wine is aged in French oak barrels.

Big Basin also sells budwood from all three varieties (a total of five different selections sourced from John Alban) and is currently seeking Cabernet Sauvignon grown from the Black Mountain/Saratoga foothills area.

Bradley Brown could be the 21st century pioneer for establishing the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation's reputation for yet another grape variety that is ideal for our cool, yet sunny, hillside vineyards.

Bradley Brown was a speaker at this year's Pinot Paradise Tech Session, talking about native yeasts, and his viticultural and winemaking practices enabling native yeast fermentation.

Directions to Silver Mountain for the May 4 meeting:
From Hwy 17: Exit onto Summit Rd., turn east on Summit
3.8 miles to right turn on San Jose-Soquel Rd.
0.5 miles to left turn on Miller Cut Off
0.9 mile to left turn on Silver Mountain Drive
From Hwy 1: Take the Bay/Porter Street exit north
(Porter becomes San Jose-Soquel)
10.7 miles to right turn on Miller Cut Off
0.9 mile to left turn on Silver Mountain Drive

**Officers of the Viticulture Association of the
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Newsletter



***Next Meeting: May 4 on Soil Fertility
With speaker Amigo Bob Cantisano***