

Napa County 2006

Ed Weber, Viticulture Farm Advisor

UC Cooperative Extension

eaweber@ucdavis.edu

The 2006 New Year rang in to the sound of flood waters raging throughout Napa Valley and the city of Napa. Although the vines were dormant and could tolerate the wet conditions, agricultural damages to land and property approached 50 million dollars. Rain continued to be the dominant story, with March experiencing the most rainy days on record, and wet weather continuing into the first two weeks of April. The vines began the growing season with soils fully charged with water, a situation similar to 2005.

Bloom conditions were ideal, with warm sunny weather prevailing in late May and early July. Most bloom occurred over a short two-week period, with several varieties blooming at nearly the same time. Early cluster counts suggested a normal size crop, with Chardonnay perhaps lagging behind due to fewer clusters. This was good news to wineries following the huge 2005 crop.

July saw early signs of botrytis bunch rot appearing in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, a situation that would only get worse later in the season. A record 10-day heat wave occurred in July with some temperatures exceeding 110 degrees. Coupled with reports about the effects of global warming on the wine industry, some postulated that Oregon or Washington may be the next great places for producing Cabernet Sauvignon and that Napa may get too hot! Despite the long heat spell, the vines suffered little damage. The residual soil moisture from the wet spring was certainly a saving grace.

A mild August led the way for the start of the sparkling wine harvest at the end of the month. Harvest was slow and steady through September. October began with rain on the 4th and 5th, but conditions were ideal for the remainder of the month with sunny, mild conditions. This allowed for extended ripening for many of the red varieties. The Cabernet harvest did not begin until late October, spurred on by rain on November 2. Overall yields were back to normal levels. Most growers with uncommitted Merlot and Cabernet were able to sell their fruit, but only at fairly low prices.

Botrytis bunch rot was a major problem in many Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vineyards at the end of the season. It even showed up in an unusual fashion in some Cabernet vineyards. The disease had started early in the season and was accelerated by the fall rain events. The ideal bloom conditions resulted in clusters tight with berries, a situation that favors the development of this disease.

Mildew was not a significant issue in 2006, nor were there significant problems with insects or mites, other than our continuing battles with the vine mealybug. The cluster disorders berry shrivel and bunch stem necrosis were both prevalent this year and are being recognized as significant issues in Cabernet production. Early reports from wineries suggest better color and extraction in Cabernet wines this year compared to 2005.