

Napa County 2001

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Mother Nature threw lots of surprises to Napa growers in 2001. In February, a rare snowstorm dropped several inches of long-lasting snow on Napa hillsides. Mountain vineyards were thick with it, creating an instant playground for local workers and their kids.

This festive cold spell (while the vines were dormant) was followed by a much more serious freeze after many vineyards had budded out. On April 3rd, temperatures throughout the county dropped into the 20's, and even into the teens in some locations. Chardonnay and other early varieties had already budded out and had several inches of growth. Significant damage occurred throughout the region. The freeze hit locations not normally considered at risk to frost (such as hillside vineyards and the Carneros region). While sprinklers were effective at protecting vineyards from damage, wind machines often were not. There was simply no warm air for them to mix, so they were just blowing freezing air. Frost damage to Napa vineyards was estimated at \$5 million. It was the worst freeze in Napa County since the early 1970's.

Spring and early summer saw rapid growth and development of the vines. All indicators pointed towards a very early harvest. Bloom was ahead of schedule, starting in early May. Most vineyards bloomed quickly and uneventfully, although some later blocks were hit by damaging heat spells towards the end of May.

Veraison was also very early, starting by the first week of July. Another heat spell that week had some predicting that harvest could actually start in July! Milder weather prevailed, and harvest began in August – still two to three weeks ahead of schedule for many growers.

Harvest was high-paced during August, and then slowed in September due to milder temperatures. Many blocks had reached high sugar levels by early September, but the fruit still had unripe flavors. This led to some tension between winemakers, who wanted fruit to hang for increased flavors, and growers who saw their tonnage diminishing due to dehydration. Some adjustments in contracted prices were considered to compensate growers for the delayed harvest. Most fruit was picked by the end of September. A heat spell in early October brought the harvest to a rapid close.

Yields were average to somewhat below average. Frost-damaged blocks experienced considerable yield losses. There were no significant problems with powdery mildew or botrytis.

Considerable stress was evident in many vineyards by September, more so than in most years. This was likely due to rainfall patterns earlier in the year. While total rainfall was

not especially low, most of it came early in the season. Little rain fell after March. This led to early stress in many vineyards that wasn't fully manifested until late in the season. In hindsight, many vineyards should have started irrigating much earlier in the year.

Mother Nature's last surprise of the season was a spectacular lightning storm in October, with hundreds of strikes per hour! Rains in October and early November were gentle, and storms were well spaced. This allowed cover crops to germinate and develop, providing erosion control during the much heavier rains that arrived in late November and early December.

Glassy-winged sharpshooters are still absent from Napa County. Blue-green sharpshooter populations were modest, and the severity of Pierce's disease was much less than in recent years. Pests that were apparent this year included mealybugs, scale and whiteflies. A new pest of olives, olive fruit fly, was detected for the first time. This insect may have a significant impact on the burgeoning specialty olive oil industry in Napa.