



To hang or not to hang: 'Hang Time' remains hot issue for growers, wineries

It's a very simple equation, but one with very different answers depending upon which side you're on.

The issue is "hang time," or prolonged fruit ripening, a practice that is used to allow good flavors to develop or undesirable flavors to decline, but also has the consequence of higher sugar content and therefore potentially higher alcohol wines.

If you're a winery seeking high quality grapes with the just-right amount of sugar, or some complex flavor components, allowing grapes more hang time could be beneficial to your production.

On the other hand, if you're a grower, hang time could cost you money: the longer grapes hang, the weight loss per berry increases. Lost berry weight equals less tonnage and fewer dollars to the grower at harvest.

"This is an issue that is definitely out on the street and there are differences of opinion about it," said Dr. Robert Wample, chairman of the Department of Viticulture and Enology at CSU, Fresno and a technical advisor to Central California Winegrowers. "The real problem probably stems from the management practices that have been in a state of



evolution for as much as 10 to 15 years, where some of the practices associated with irrigation, canopy management, crop load management and the like, go together to potentially create a situation where the vine is able to accumulate sugars more rapidly than it dissipates bad or increases good flavors."

Wample said that all of these management factors result in a situation where the development of flavor and sugar content is out of sync.

"There's very little disagreement that the delay of harvest in most cases has resulted in wines with better flavors," Wample said. "But at what expense to the grower? That's a major part of this issue."

Notwithstanding the production benefits from hang time for wineries, the practice can cost growers money. For example, if the average weight loss associated

with hang time is 1/10 of a gram per berry and the initial crop load is five tons per acre, the weight loss to growers could easily be in the area of a 1/2-ton yield loss per acre.

"If the grower was being paid based on the quality of wine being sold, then the grower could be compensated based on the price of a bottle of wine," Wample said. "But if there's not compensation for weight loss, then every time a berry loses 1/10 of a gram, the grower is losing money."

The subjective valuations assigned to hang time is the key reason growers have expressed concern with the issue.

"Growers and wineries have historically used objective measurements to determine quality and contract standards and to base proper compensation," said Nat DiBuduo, president of Allied Grape Growers, a California winegrape cooperative

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National ad launched to lure wine drinkers

Using an eye-catching combination of old and new, the Wine Market Council has launched a national advertising campaign designed to grow current wine drinkers and to develop new ones.

"Wine – Since 6,000 B.C." uses a series of three ads to relay the idea that wine has been a part of everyday life since the dawn of civilization.

According to John Gillespie, president of the Wine Market Council, demand for table wine in the U.S. is surging more strongly than ever and prospects for continued growth are favorable. An all-time record of 232 million cases of table wine were consumed in 2003.



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From my side of the vine

In the winegrowing business, or any business, **numbers** talk. That concept couldn't be truer than with the Central California Winegrowers, the organization formed to provide educational and marketing support to our wine industry and to enhance the quality, reputation and marketability of Central California wine products.

For two years we've remained steadfast in our efforts to inform growers, partner with vintners, and expose the public to our products. Here's a sample of what we've been doing on your behalf:

- Sponsored the annual Grape Symposium providing local growers with timely, end-of-season industry information.
- Funded with grants university research on management practices and presented this



Ron Metzler
Executive Director

information to growers.

- Continued to bridge the gap between growers and vintners.
- Promoted our region and its high quality grapes to the state and the world, bringing increased name recognition to

our area and products.

- Informed the public about our grape growing region and its impact on the economy.
- Provided a forum for growers to air grievances and to alert each other about issues.
- Established innovative methods to communicate with growers including this newsletter, tailgates, wine socials, workshops and meetings.

As we look at what we've accomplished during the past two years, it's exciting to think about where we still have to go. And while our board and grower and vintner members all sub-

scribe to this mission, there's always room for more.

Numbers count. With additional members CCW is able to offer more services and programs for its growers. **Numbers** count. When CCW provides information to elected officials the power of a substantial membership base makes a difference. **Numbers** count. As CCW works to promote our region, it benefits all of us who grow wine and related products.

With that in mind I encourage you to renew your membership or join today. CCW has made headway in California's wine industry. The participation of each of us is needed to ensure the success of this region in the future. Please call me at (559) 618-1856 to share your ideas about CCW or email me at info@ccwinegrowers.org.

Future brightens for concentrate market

California grapes grown for concentrate will face increased competition from foreign producers and other products in the future. The industry will need to accentuate quality factors in its marketing and producers will need to increase yields and keep costs down to maintain the viability of this important market, according to research sponsored by Central California Winegrowers.

Dr. Mechel S. Paggi, director for the Center for Agricultural Business at CSU, Fresno and lead researcher on the project, presented his findings at CCW's annual symposium in December. Paggi presented an overall profile of the industry, including supply and demand; a synopsis of the role of international trade on the market; and

a review of the industry's future.

"While overall demand for grape juice concentrate for use in food and beverage production may increase, unless California changes how it markets its products, the increase may be captured by lower priced imports," Paggi said.

"California should market more aggressively the positive attributes associated with the health and safety standards applied by the industry, such as traceability, relative to imports. The opportunities are there but it demands an attitude shift in marketing."

Paggi's research also suggested that new management practices with an emphasis on higher yields and lower costs would be necessary. He suggested research and development on

both management practices and varieties will be crucial to achieving and maintaining a viable production system.

The concentrate study focused primarily on white varieties, namely Thompson grapes, which are used in the concentrate business as sweeteners. Paggi now will continue looking at red varieties, which have a different role in the concentrate industry because of their importance as a blend for color.

Some of Paggi's information is presented graphically, such as the supply-and-demand chart, a price analysis for growers and the costs of production. This information can be accessed through the Central California Winegrowers website at www.ccwinegrowers.org.

Produce quality grapes. Treat the wine with respect. Give the wine its due. The combination of these three tenets are what make Silkwood Wines owner John Monnich say that his Stanislaus County-produced wines are as good as any wine produced anywhere.

Monnich originally founded Silkwood in 1979 in Napa Valley. Today the Modesto winery produces award-winning red wines from its own vineyards in Stanislaus County. The varietals produced are Petite Sirah, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon.

"We produce wines that are big, black, bold and beautiful," Monnich said. "They are well-balanced wines that stand out on the shelf! People truly enjoying drinking them."

Silkwood evolved over the years, moving locations twice before Monnich and college friend, Rodney Beard, joined together in the venture. Beard owns vineyards along the Tuolumne River that produce exceptional quality grapes.

"You should take advantage of the qualities that you have to work with," Monnich said.



Silkwood's label received a first place for its design.

"Syrahs are particularly easy to work with and do particularly well in the Central Valley."

Another factor that sets Silkwood Wines apart is the harvest method. Monnich takes advantage of weather, allowing his fruit to ripen longer on the vine, sometimes to the point of falling to the ground.

"We hand-harvest everything and then we hand sort, then we hand sort, and then we hand sort, three times, and it makes a difference in the quality of wine we're able to

produce," he said, adding that reducing dry brittle leaves from clusters is conducive to better quality wines.

The process, while tedious, has produced a seven-time gold medal award-winning 2000 Syrah, which has been approved for a future dinner pairing at the Bush White House. The 2001 Silkwood Petite Sirah just received a coveted Double Gold medal at the Florida State Wine Competition, as well as a Gold Medal at the Orange County Wine Competition, proving again that Central California wines can be of excellent quality.

Silkwood's Cabernet Sauvignon is still young. A Cab-Syrah blend called "Red Duet" offers a smooth, balanced finish on the back palate and it has produced two medals.

Another area in which Silkwood sets itself apart is innovative marketing.

"Innovation rules," Monnich said. "If you don't innovate and market, you'll be ordinary. You have to be different and you must have good quality wine."

Silkwood Wines LLC Award-Winning Wines (Partial list)

Red Duet

- Best of Class – Gold Medal, California State Fair Wine Competition
- Silver, California State Fair Wine Competition

Silkwood 2001 Petite Sirah

- Double Gold, Florida State Fair Wine Competition
- Gold Medal, Orange County Fair Wine Competition

Silkwood 2000 Syrah:

- Best of Class – Gold Medal, California State Fair
- Gold Medal, California State Fair
- Gold Medal, American Wine Society
- Double Gold, San Francisco Chronicle Competition
- Gold Medal, Pacific Rim International Competition

Silkwood's red velvet wine label is an example of that kind of innovation.

Monnich believes in Central Valley wines and compliments Central California Winegrowers in its efforts to market the area.

"CCW is a viable organization," he said. "The wines produced here are excellent, so why not have an organization that's creating awareness about them?"

BOARD PROFILE

Steve Schafer, Vice President

As a fourth generation grower in the San Joaquin Valley, Steve Schafer knows a thing or two about grapes, whether for wine, raisins or the table. His great-grandfather planted vineyards in Madera County in the early 1900s and his father began growing winegrapes before Schafer was born.

While Schafer Ranch, Inc. also grows almonds and walnuts, the winegrowing component interested Schafer so much, he decided to become more involved in the industry.



Steve Schafer

"I had the opportunity to become a member of the California Association of Winegrape Growers' board," he said. "That gave me a real good perspective of our industry statewide. I met growers from all over the state and had the opportunity to see more of our needs from a governmental and regulatory viewpoint.

"But it struck me as odd that we [Central Valley growers] were the biggest producer

of grapes in terms of tonnage, but the only area with no organization whose specific charge was the promotion of its grapes," Schafer said. "We needed an organization whose goal was to change the perception and to market our grapes to the rest of the world. That's how I became involved in CCW."

Schafer, who just came off a chairmanship for CAWG, now serves as a Vice President for CCW. His leadership opportunities and his experience give him a unique perspective on the organization.

"The difference between being successful and not is in

your strategic plan: where is the business going to go?" he said. "It's for that reason we need CCW. Everyone outside of the Valley realizes the ability of Central California growers to produce, now we have to promote ourselves, as well."

Schafer commented on the efforts of Madera County vintners to promote themselves.

"We can build on that Valley-wide," he said. "Our Central California grapes are in demand and we have a great ability to produce super-value wines. CCW helps us get there. I believe the opportunity is ripe for winegrowers in our area."



CCW

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Smart Marketer Workshop March 24

Learn contracting principles, contract evaluation and negotiating strategies at the Smart Marketer Workshop directed by CAWG, March 24, 2-4 p.m. at the Fresno County Farm Bureau office, 1274 W. Hedges in Fresno. Seating is limited and reservations are required. Please respond by March 21 to CCW, (559) 618-1856, or email to info@ccwinegrowers.org.

Hang Time

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association. "When the wineries change to subjective evaluations that are not in current contracts, there is cause for grower concern. Growers are left hanging in the air waiting for wineries to determine harvest and in the meantime, growers are losing weight, losing dollars and, usually, losing sleep."

The California Association of Winegrape Growers, or CAWG, announced that it retained Stan Grant of Progressive Viticulture to con-

duct a literature review of hang time including its effects on winegrape yield and quality, as well as the effects of short post-harvest periods on grapevine health and vineyard sustainability. Likewise, Wample's field trials investigating various management strategies may contribute information to the issue.

"The challenge we have is to look for management strategies in the vineyard that will get the vines back in sync for sugar and flavor," Wample said.

DiBudo, likewise, is ready for a solution.

"We need a remedy that allows wineries to harvest the grapes at their determination and properly compensates growers for their losses," he said. "Growers and vintners need to continue working together to develop objective measurements to determine ideal bearing weight, ideal ecological conditions and how much loss it will take to get there. Only then will we be able to calculate compensation properly."

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