



August 2017

The fruit has started to turn color. The whites are softening and getting that gentle touch of gold, the reds are somewhere from 25% to 100% purple. Veraison is defined (*we learned at the Symposium*) when half the grapes in most clusters are purple. What an amazing transformation, from hard, green bitter balls of acid to bright, sugary, juicy grapes in less than two weeks.

Powdery & Downey Mildew Control

I hope you have sprayed for Powdery Mildew continuously through the season. I have heard that Stylet Oil has the same rules, but I'm not sure. I don't use oil so if someone has information, please share. Thanks to Steve Kahle for his writeup last week on using oil late in the season. I'm looking forward to hearing how that turns out as harvest nears.

Downey mildew has been seen in a few Ramona vineyards this year. So far, again, it seems to be most likely in Grenache and Aglianico. Proper rotations including Pristine and copper have kept it under control.

We want to continue the spray program until veraison is complete. Even then, don't stop spraying Dipel to keep skeletonizers under control. AND IF IT RAINS ON RIPE BUNCHES - have a spray program of Luna or equivalent ready to go. Bunch rot caused by rain soaked grapes can ruin your entire crop in very short time. *At the Symposium* we learned about a new product developed in Germany and sold here by Westbridge - "Botector". It is a yeast that coats the entire grape and blocks the entry location for Botrytis. It is pricey and needs to be refrigerated. Hopefully we'll learn more about that soon.

Water

Most of this year we've been ahead of the water curve. The really hot weather in June has changed that. I am noticing some stressed vines and a few drying (unripe) grape clusters. Don't let the soil get too dry. Rich McClellan says that once you let the soil dry out, drip irrigation cannot catch up.

After getting educated at the Symposium, I'm changing my watering schedule! I'll be doing stress watering before veraison and full use water after veraison. The most recent studies show that photosynthesis needs water to convert sunlight into magic.

Bird & Bee Netting

We are not growing wine grapes, we are growing bird candy. It is time now to have all your net in place. Only the absolute latest varieties don't need to be netted now so that late season spraying can continue.

Measuring your Grapes

Now is the time to start measuring your grapes. Make sure your tools & supplies are on hand

and working properly. Calibrate your pH meter, clean and test your refractometer (use distilled water and a 25% sugar solution). Make sure you have fresh sodium hydroxide (0.1 normal). Clean all your work surfaces and containers.

Sample each block of your grapes to get an AVERAGE reading across the whole block. Sample end to end and on both sides of the rows to account for differences of sunshine. I like to zig-zag down one row and up another (not right next to it). Week after week I change rows so that eventually most of the block gets tested.

Sample grapes from all parts of the cluster, they ripen at different speeds but you will pick them all: top, middle, bottom, front and back. Sample bunches that are in sunshine and bunches that are in the shade. Don't only pick the prettiest clusters. After ~ 100 grapes are in the zip lock bag - make juice - crush them with a pestle or glass jar.

1. test the Brix (percent of sugar) - if that number is with 3 points of target,
2. test the pH - if the sugar is nearly good,
3. test the titratable acid (TA), this test is time consuming so I don't do this until it matters.

Keep your Customer (Winemaker) Informed

One of Ramona's competitive advantages is that the grape growers and winemakers are close, communicate often, and don't decide on harvest date in a vacuum. KEEP IT THAT WAY - IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

Every week send your winemaker the results of your testing. The winemaker needs to plan for harvest, you want your grapes to be perfect. Here is a copy of the email I sent to my customers late in the 2016 season showing the testing history for all the blocks during that year:

The Brunello block 2 has moved another point and should be getting close. It is still holding the acid numbers and the winemaker can pretty much pick the BRIX target they are comfortable with. The grapes are beautifully mature with tannic skins, brown seeds, great color and flavor. Last year was 1370 pounds.

The Sangiovese is getting really good, the yield will be much larger than last year's 3000 pounds. I think we should consider it two weeks out - giving the grapes just a little more time to mature.

Both Cab blocks are a little strange; the BRIX and acid numbers are right on, but the grapes are not physiologically mature. The seeds are light, the skin is stringy and vegetative and the juice is much too pale. If we were picking just by the numbers I think we would get not-great wine.

	Varietal	BRIX	pH	TA
sensory				
Sept 5, 2016				
	Sangiovese	23.5	3.26	.79
7/8 seeds, skins OK, taste good, great color				
	Brunello			
1				
9/4				
	Brunello			
			picked on Sunday	

2	23.5	3.28	.88	seeds dark, skin tannin +,
color ++ & flavor ++				
		Cabernet		
1	24.2	3.3	.82	seeds 1/2, flavor OK, color
pale, skin -				
		Cabernet		
2	24.0	3.39	.80	seeds 1/2, flavor OK, color
pale, skin vegetative				
		Aglianico		

AUGUST 2017 ADENDUM :

this week will be brutal on your grapes.

It is a good idea to provide full demand water after veraison.

The leaves need water to turn sunshine into sugar and transmit the sugar to the grapes.

This week it is ESPECIALLY important to keep those leaves healthy.

If you have been trying post-veraison deficit irrigation, this is not the week for that.

Don't let the plants or the upper 2 feet of soil dry out