***September 28, 2011 – Santa Rosa, CA*:** Sonoma County Vintners, the premier marketing organization for Sonoma County's wine and wineries, will be issuing a series of monthly updates on the 2011 harvest season from the perspectives of wineries in each of Sonoma County's largest regions.

Grapes for sparkling wines are harvested at a lower sugar level than those being used for still wines, which results in sparkling winemakers typically picking the first grapes each year. In Carneros, **Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards** began harvesting their sparkling Pinot Noir grapes from Glen Ellen on August 24, and their estate vineyards on Saturday September 3. They have finished picking all of the Pinot Noir grapes for sparkling wines and will wrap up picking Chardonnay for sparkling wines by September 29. The Pinot Noir for still wines on their estate will be picked by October 3, and their estate Chardonnay for still wines should be picked by October 5.

Steven Urberg, Winemaker for Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards had the following comments to share regarding the 2011 Harvest: "The good news is the quality looks very good. The long slow summer, diminished yield and tiny berries have given us wonderful fruit with plenty of hang time. So far it looks like a great year for still Pinot Noir. From the winemaking perspective, I am expecting concentrated wines with intense vineyard character. The bad news is from the economic perspective, as we are looking at crop levels far below normal. In other words, if the weather continues for at least a few more days with warm, dry days, we look forward to smaller amounts of wonderful wine that we make from the 2011 harvest. Right now we are up against rain that is expected next week, early to mid-week. Fortunately, we are planning to have all of our fruit in prior to the middle of next week, so we're hoping for a speedy end to harvest."

In the Sonoma Valley, **Chateau St. Jean** received their first grapes on Tuesday, September 6. The first pick was Sauvignon Blanc coming in from one of the County's warmest areas, Alexander Valley. As of this week, the winery has received about half of their expected Sauvignon Blanc (from Alexander Valley and Russian River Valley) and Pinot Noir (coming from the Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley). Their Pinot Gris harvesting is complete and they are just starting Chardonnay, which is being harvested from the Robert Young and Belle Terre Vineyards in Alexander Valley.

Chateau St. Jean Winemaker Margo Van Staaveren highlighted the results so far by saying, "Though the yield is down in Sauvignon Blanc and slightly down in Pinot Noir, the quality looks

very nice. Acidities are bright and we look forward to well-structured wines with good depth."

In the Russian River Valley, **Rodney Strong Vineyards** started harvest September 6 with some northern Alexander Valley Sauvignon Blanc which was used for their annual blessing of the grapes. September 8 brought Pinot Noir from Russian River Valley, the first of the season for our Winery within a Winery, where smaller lots of wines are made.

Mid September brought more Sauvignon Blanc from Alexander Valley, along with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Russian River Valley, all at a moderate pace.

According to **Douglas McIlroy, Rodney Strong's Director of Winegrowing, "T**hings really picked up last week and harvest started and continues to be in full swing with Sauvignon Blanc along with some Chardonnay from the Alexander Valley as well as some Zinfandel from our Hubbard Ranch, also in Alexander Valley. We're also bringing in Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot from Russian River Valley and southern Sonoma Coast. Overall yields are down quite a bit, in some case even lower than estimated. Quality seems to be similar to last year, which was excellent for most vineyards harvested before the fall rains. The warm weather in recent weeks has really moved things along this year."

In the Dry Creek Valley, **Quivira Vineyards & Winery** began their harvest on September 8, the same day as in 2010. They have just completed picking of their Sauvignon Musque, Sauvignon Blanc, Gewurtztraminer and Viognier and began their Zinfandel, Syrah and mixed Rhones for Rose on September 25. All grapes are from the Dry Creek Valley.

Hugh Chappelle, Quivira Vineyards & Winery Winemaker and Grower had the following comments on this first month of harvest: "2011 is shaping up to be a more compressed harvest than usual. We usually would not be finished harvesting our estate fruit until the end of October/early November. This year, consistently warm temperatures have us on track to harvest all of our estate fruit by mid-October."

Chappelle also shared some thoughts on his Zinfandel, which is one of Dry Creek Valley's most planted varietals: "2011 is shaping up to be a very compressed harvest. What we normally spread across 3+ weeks will likely need to be picked in 2 weeks or less. Our early picked Zinfandel is showing bright red fruit flavors and classic dark fruit notes with nicely balanced acidity."

Jordan Vineyard & Winery in Alexander Valley brought their first Russian River Chardonnay grapes in on Tuesday, September 27. **Jordan Winemaker Rob**

Davis commented, “We are only into our second day of harvest of Chardonnay, but what we are experiencing is consistent with our observations of the growing season: very good acidity due to the coolness of the summer and nice varietal flavors, but cluster weights are off by 25% which is the principal reason for below average yields in the vineyards. In addition, small cluster weights are pressing out smaller juice yields by another factor of 10%. Equally light is the Merlot and Cabernet. The maturation cycle is very similar to last year. The weather could not be better. A minimum of two-three more weeks of growing time is absolutely essential to ensuring the crop to come in as optimal as possible.”

Sonoma County Vintners will be posting all regional harvest-related news on their website, www.sonomawine.com , and will issue monthly updates throughout the harvest season.

About Sonoma County Vintners

Sonoma County Vintners is the leading voice of Sonoma County wine, dedicated to increasing awareness and improving the quality image of its wines to consumers, media, and trade locally and globally. With almost 65,000 vineyard acres planted among the county’s 13 American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), Sonoma County is considered one of the world’s premier winegrowing regions, producing an unparalleled range of varietals and wine styles. SCV has promoted this diversity and quality since 1944, and currently represents more than 165 member wineries and 25 Affiliate Members. For more information on the wines and wineries of Sonoma County, visit www.sonomawine.com .

About Sonoma County Winegrape Commission

The Sonoma County Winegrape Commission was established in 2006 as a non-profit marketing and educational organization dedicated to the promotion of Sonoma County as one of the world’s premier grape growing regions. SCWC’s goal is to increase awareness and recognition of the quality and diversity of Sonoma County’s grapes and wines through dynamic marketing and educational programs targeted to wine consumers around the world. For more information about SCWC and its programs, visit www.sonomawinegrape.org

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