

Yields down, but quality outstanding in much of the region –
Last push is ON with rain expected by weekend

November 2, 2011 – Santa Rosa, CA: Vintners and growers throughout Sonoma County are wrapping up the 2011 harvest season this week. Final mountainside grapes and other late-ripening varieties are being picked in time to avoid rain expected in coming days.

Region by region, variety by variety, and vineyard by vineyard, reports indicate that there was much variation experienced in terms of yield and timing of harvest, but the general consensus indicates that overall yield was down by an estimated 20% from the average, though quality of the fruit that was picked was very good to excellent with distinctive attributes resulting from the cooler-than-normal growing season.

Sonoma County Vintners, the premier marketing organization for Sonoma County's wine and wineries, is issuing a series of updates on the 2011 harvest season from the perspectives of wineries in each of Sonoma County's largest regions. In addition, Nick Frey, president of the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission shares a county-wide overview.

We last checked in after the rains in early October. This update covers the balance of the month, which marks the end of harvest for the majority of Sonoma County's vintners and grape growers.

In the Sonoma Valley, **Chateau St. Jean** winemaker **Margo Van Staaveren** reported:

“For the balance of October, we focused on our Bordeaux varietals. We did have a few warmer fall days that brought many of the remaining vineyard blocks to fuller maturity. This has been a year of gradual ripening and we're finding richness in the skins and a lack of green characters.”

“This vintage will finish lighter than normal, but we have some beautiful Merlot from our Asti vineyard in Alexander Valley, some very concentrated mountain Cabernet Franc from Sonoma

Valley and bright Pinot Gris from Sonoma Coast. We'll finish the season this Wednesday, November 2nd just in time to celebrate on Friday."

In the Russian River Valley, **Rodney Strong Vineyards** Director of Winegrowing **Douglas McIlroy** share
d the following:

"After the rains of early October subsided, Rodney Strong had mostly Bordeaux varieties left to pick. Knowing the clock was ticking on the last third of harvest, we got to work prioritizing vineyards to pick based on maturity and quality potential. We worked at a faster pace than we ever have to bring in the rest of harvest. Thanks to some warm weather in late October, harvest finished in the middle of October's last week without leaving a single vineyard unpicked."

"Overall, as we have had time to evaluate wines from earlier in harvest, we find that this year's Pinots are truly some of the best ever, Chardonnay is exceptional, and our Zins and Sauvignon Blanc have turned out very well. As for Cabernets and Merlots, they have surprised us with tremendous color and flavor while finishing off fermentation with alcohols right where our winemakers like to see them. This harvest certainly had its ups and downs like we haven't seen in many years, but overall it has surprised us how well it has turned out."

In the Dry Creek Valley, **Quivira Vineyards & Winery** Winemaker **Hugh Chappelle** had the following comments:

"Harvest wrapped up this past Tuesday at Quivira, with the last of our estate fruit, the Mourvedre, coming in. We luckily had much of our Zinfandel in before the rains, so were only dealing with a modest amount afterwards. Botrytis did get a foothold, mostly in Zinfandel and Petite Sirah, but was manageable with aggressive sorting in the field and on the sorting table. Later ripening Syrah sites, Mourvedre, and Grenache also came in after the rains, but their looser clusters and thicker skins made them less susceptible to moisture. Overall yield varied a great deal in Dry Creek Valley, vineyard by vineyard."

"Sauvignon Blanc, once again, looks to be a standout. Its earlier ripening saved it from being significantly affected by the mid-late season rains. Zinfandel is very site specific, with some sites impacted more than others. With rigorous sorting, there should be some very fine wines

as flavors, tannins, and acid were all in balance at lower sugars than normal. Sommeliers should love this vintage for its alcohol and acid balance!"

In Alexander Valley, **Jordan Vineyard & Winery** Winemaker **Rob Davis** commented:

"The two events that marked the vintage of 2011 were the untimely rain at bloom that affected fertilization and again, the untimely rain followed by showers in October. Those events resulted in a one-third reduction in crop for us."

"Last year our overall Cabernet crop averaged 24.5 brix. This year we finished at 23.3 brix. But this year's fruit has vivid aromas of cherries, strawberries and blackberries with nice firm acidity to frame the fruit. Tannins are not quite as broad as last year- definitely softer and surprisingly pleasing for such a young wine."

"We completed our harvest on one of the most beautiful days of October. 2011, the "vintage of the long faces"- due to low yields for grower and winery alike, comes to an end bathed in a glow of fall colors across the vineyards. As the last grapes hit the sorting table, I know grower and winery alike will exhale with a long sigh and take joy in a glass or two of wine to celebrate the denouement of this year's vintage and look forward to a more amiable 2012 spring."

Nick Frey, President of the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission, shared the following general update on the 2011 Sonoma County grape harvest:

"As of November 1, the last mountainside cabernet is being harvested – a few hundred tons – with likely finish the next day. Mountain fruit looks good. Everything else has come in for the most part. The weather has continued to be warm and sunny with a strong breeze today. There is a strong chance of rain Thursday so the push is on to finish everything by Wednesday evening."

Sonoma County Vintners has posted all regional harvest-related news and updates at www.sonomawine.com

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 175 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 .