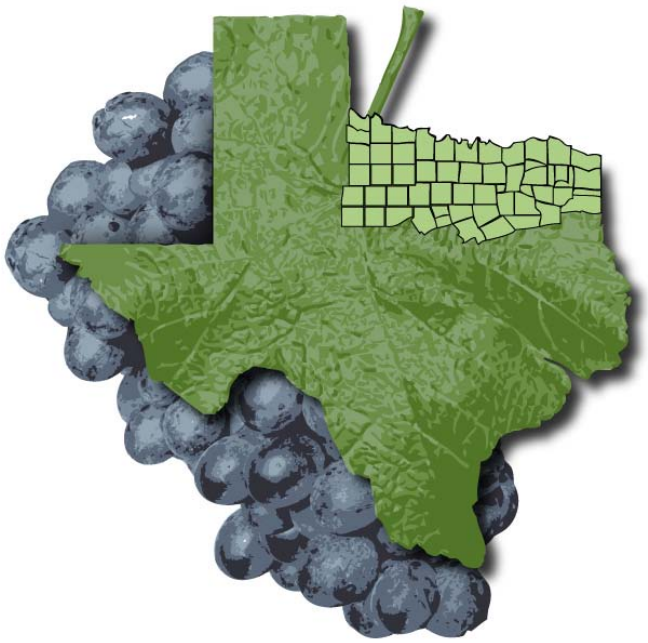
AgriLIFE EXTENSION
Texas A&M System



North Texas Vineyard News

Fall, 2010

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2010 Winegrape Season
North Texas

Fabulous is just one word floating around that sums up the satisfaction over what the majority of North Texas vineyards produced. We can look forward to some very lovely wines from this season.


Brennan Vineyards

In the field, the absence of frost damage allows us an uncluttered view of our viticulture practices.

Let's take a look back.

The winter was cold and stayed that way until the temperatures slowly and gently shifted from winter to spring, allowing vines to deacclimate. Buds burst then primary shoots and clusters shot forth unharmed. Rainfall during rapid growth was seldom, humidity was not oppressive. It was an ideal spring for both disease control and vigor control. Yet, phomopsis and black rot still managed to penetrate in some places. Possible causes: perhaps fungicide spray coverage was incomplete, not early enough or, inconsistent. Rains occurred shortly before bloom, opening the door to downy mildew, powdery mildew, and the spread of Phomopsis and BR to clusters. East Texas was

drought-stricken for most of the season, so sufficient irrigation and deer were chief concerns.

Some insects were fewer in number than in previous years, thanks to the cold winter, but not Grape Berry Moth. Bloom to fruitset proved to be paradise for them. At least 8 vineyards invested in GBM traps, but some adjustments are needed in using traps for timely insecticide applications.

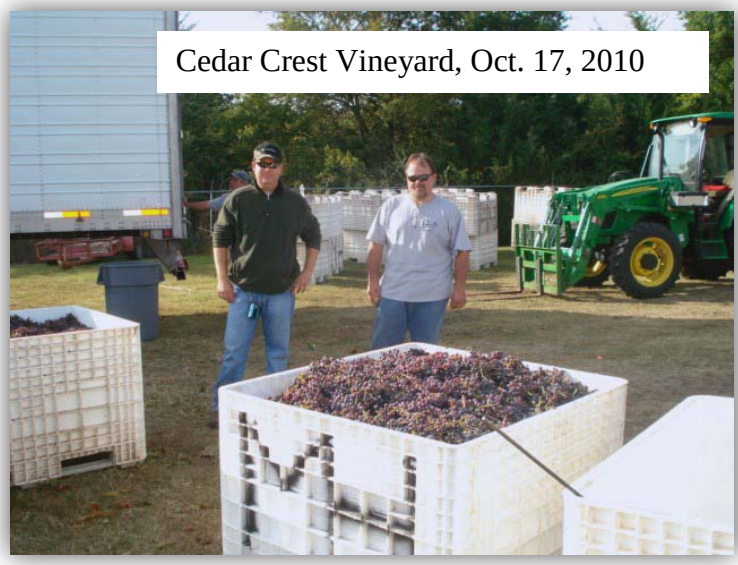
All in all, the weather was kind from pruning to veraison. For grape quality, shoot thinning and cluster thinning decisions needed to be made before veraison. There was much more thinning needed than in previous years, and finding the time to do it properly was a challenge. After veraison, there was some disease and pest management, but it was minimal when compared to the focus needed on keeping the vines hydrated during the *HEATWAVE* without overwatering. Accurate crop estimation became a huge preharvest concern as the season presented unprecedented yield and quality.

2010 had fantastic harvest. Growing grapes in a year that was free of a late spring frost and major fungal disease outbreaks revealed some shortcoming in viticulture experience, such as canopy management practices, cluster thinning, and GBM control. There's always something new to learn, which keeps grape growing a constant challenge. The year also revealed an industry of passionate growers and winemakers working together to hold themselves to a higher standard.

North Texas Grapes Harvested Oct 17.

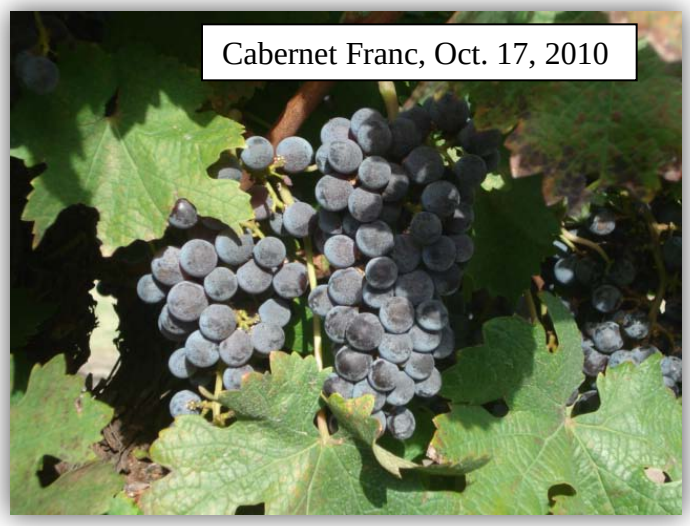
A postharvest newsletter was in my plan since January, but who knew in January that "postharvest" would mean October 17? With a pH at 3.3 and Brix inching towards 20, a North Texas grower and cooperating winery, agreed on October 1 to apply Pristine and postpone harves. With Pristine's 14 day PHI, this decision delayed their harvest date to no sooner than October 15. Logistics between winery and vineyard determined an October 17 date for Cabernet Sauvignon (10%) and Cabernet Franc (90%). Tank chemistry was reported at 22.8°Brix and pH 3.7.

Great weather, close communication between winery and grower, and Pristine assisted this crop in taking its time to ripen. There was concern over uneven ripening of clusters, as some vines had clusters at different levels of maturity. Unevenly ripening clusters is normally associated with uneven development of shoots and clusters beginning at budburst. Grapes picked prematurely, particularly red grapes, often have an herbaceous character, but by Oct. 17, at Cedar Crest in Denison, all herbaceousness associated with immature grapes was reduced, allowing the characteristic varietal flavors to shine through.



Cedar Crest Vineyard, Oct. 17, 2010

The risks of allowing these grapes to hang were mainly bunch rot, excessive raisining, and failure of the grapes to mature. These risks are quite real. There are other nightmares that can also be thrown into the mix – berry drop, green June beetle, raccoons, birds, terrorists, will I still have a job if this doesn't work. This year was extraordinary and allowed an extended hang time that is not always possible for North Texas.



Reducing Herbaceousness Before Veraison.

Methoxypyrazines (MP) can be detected in some of our Texas wines. MP are aromatic compounds responsible for herbaceous, vegetal, and bell pepper aromas - an undesirable characteristic of red varietals. Richard Smart summarized the viticulture practices to improve quality in a very readable article in Practical Winey & Vineyard (Smart, R., Practical Winery & Vineyard. July/August, 2010. pgs. 6-9).
Although trade journals do not cite them, the practices suggested in Smart's article are backed by research that is found in various scientific journals.

MP synthesis occurs prior to veraison. They begin to break down after veraison as the berries begin to swell and mature. Reduced level of MP is an indicator of berry maturity.
Since water availability, by irrigation or rainfall, influences the amount of vegetative growth, careful reading of your vine's water status is essential prior to veraison. Be careful not to over- or under-irrigate.
Managing vines' canopy by removing excess shoots, especially laterals close to clusters, prior to veraison can reduce the level of MP by promoting their molecular breakdown. Exposure of developing clusters to sunlight contributes to the degradation of MP.

Bottomline

- Conditions that lead to more vigorous growth, especially higher water status or lower croploads, are positively correlated with higher MP concentrations (herbaceousness) in fruit at harvest.
- Shaded fruit accumulates more MP than well-exposed fruit.
- MP concentrations in ripe fruit can be reduced by managing vine vigor and sunlight exposure of clusters - "prior to veraison".

Practices between fruitset and veraison will have the greatest impact on the vegetal character of winegrapes. Those practices include shoot thinning when shoots are 6-10 inch, and regulating water between fruitset and veraison. By veraison, these critical decisions will have already been made.
Once veraison appears, concerns with disease control continue, and there are the insects and animals of all sizes to be concerned with.
A Vineyard is made up of separate blocks or varieties, and vineyard practices should likewise be considered by block or variety - pruning, irrigation, fertilization, shoot thinning, pesticide applications, harvest, etc.

Post Harvest Vines.

Dormancy is a process that begins after leaf fall as the vines acclimate to lower temperatures. The ideal acclimation process allows grapevines a slow progression as temperatures lower. During this time, the vines convert starch and sucrose to compounds that lower tissue freezing points. This process equips our vines to better handle fickle winter temperatures. Vines can acclimate for dormancy more readily in dry years than in wet ones.
According to Dry and Coombe, 2005, in Viticulture 1: Resources, "Young, heavy-cropping or otherwise stressed vines with low carbohydrate reserves suffer most". Also, grapevines are not able to accumulate adequate carbohydrate reserves if the leaves fall off prematurely – whether due to Downy Mildew, drought, Pierce's Disease, or other causes.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for suggestions, comments, or more information.

Fall Winegrape Events

PROSPECTIVE WINEGRAPE GROWER WORKSHOP

Date: Thursday, November 18, 2010
Time: 8:30 am – 3pm
Location: Gillespie County Extension
95 Frederick
Fredericksburg, TX
Instructor: Penny Adams (830) 997-7047
Fee: $125 per person, $200 per couple.
Lunch & materials included.
Register Online: http://agrilifevents.tamu.edu
Or by phone: (979) 845-2604

GRAPE CAMP 2010

Grape Camp is an educational program hosted by the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association for commercial vineyard owners & anyone interested in learning about grape growing in Texas.

Dates: Sunday – Monday, November 7-8
Location: Lady Bird Johnson Pavilion
Fredericksburg, TX

To register visit:
http://www.txwines.org/grapecamp/default.asp

For more winegrape events, go to
http://winegrapes.tamu.edu