



CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION
of WINEGRAPE
GROWERS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAWG Statement on Smoke Exposure Events, Winegrapes and Wineries

SACRAMENTO, Sept. 3, 2020 – Last month’s widespread lightning storms resulted in multiple fast-moving and devastating wildfires that affected many regions of the state. More than 1 million acres have burned, resulting in lives lost, damaged structures and property, and smoke-filled days. These wildfires have produced unprecedented challenges for California’s winegrape growers and wineries.

Growers and wineries have been challenged to determine with certainty how smoke from the state’s many fires has affected this year’s winegrape crop. With that in mind, **California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) President John Aguirre issued the following statement:**

“Numerous growers have reported that wineries will not schedule delivery of grapes under contract until laboratory test results are available to indicate the grapes are unaffected by the presence of certain smoke compounds. The few commercial labs serving the industry are backlogged, with wait times of three or more weeks to test and report the results for new grape samples. In other instances, wineries are delaying harvest and grape deliveries pending the completion of small-batch or micro-fermentations of grapes and resulting analyses. These delays – in addition to wineries demanding test results – mean many growers face the prospect of significant crop losses and economic injury. This is unacceptable.

“Unless specified in a contract, no buyer should believe they are entitled to reject a grower’s grapes based on concerns over smoke damage without corroborating evidence to indicate those grapes have, in fact, been damaged. It’s important to acknowledge a key fact: the presence of smoke in a vineyard, even if heavy at times, does not mean the grapes from that vineyard will invariably be smoke damaged. The challenges posed by recent smoke exposure events do not provide license to buyers to cast aside their contractual obligations to growers.

“CAWG urges California’s wineries to work with their grower partners to address the shared risks resulting from smoke exposure events. We ask wineries to consider the following:

- Communicate as soon as possible the standards and conditions, consistent with contract terms, that will be used to decide the acceptability of grapes.
- Decision-making should be transparent to the grower and determinations regarding the quality status of grapes should be based upon or corroborated by test results from a third-party, accredited laboratory.
- When data regarding grape quality is unavailable, wineries should discuss with growers, prior to harvest, risk sharing arrangements that are fair and equitable to both parties.
- In the absence of express contractual authority to do so, wineries are not entitled to impose upon growers’ terms and conditions related to smoke damage risks after accepting and processing grapes delivered under contract.

“CAWG recognizes the timing of recent wildfires presents exceptional challenges for growers and wineries. We are confident that growers and wineries will unite to overcome current and future challenges, protect the California brand and ensure our wines meet consumers’ expectations for quality and value.”

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