



Country Viniculture in the Heart of the Foothills

Trellis Wire

March 2024

www.SWGGA.org



A Message From The President

Transition Time in the Vineyard

As a small commercial grape grower, after the hectic harvest season, winter is a time to rest and recuperate. Especially here in the Sierra Foothills, where we can have weeks and weeks of rain or maybe even snow. But now that March is here, it's time to start thinking about and transition to the upcoming season.

What repairs can you do now? How about inventorying your supplies, fertilizers, pest control materials. Should you apply a dormant spray; what should you use and when?

The big task of course, is pruning. Due to Eutypa (dead arm disease) in my vineyard, I prune as late as possible (late March, early April) since it spreads by entering pruning cuts during rain. I wait until the vines are "pushing" sap. However, in between storms, we can "pre-prune" down to 12-18" of vine. Vines always bud out from the top, so if we have a late freeze, your lower buds will be intact. When we go back to do the final pruning, there's less work since we've already pulled all the long portions off the wires and disposed of them and the final pruning will go faster.

What else should we be thinking about? Come find out at our March meeting. One of our new board members, Gerard Van Steyn will be presenting a program on vineyard maintenance.

Cheers, Diane.

April 18th. Ponderosa Hall.

What Should I Do Next With My Wine?

The April program is all about evaluating your as yet un-bottled wines. How are they doing? What do they need? What is there too much of? What is there not enough of? What should you do next? Do you have an un-bottled wine you would like to hear comments on? Especially for you relatively new winemakers. There is probably room for 6 to 8 wines. If you're interested or have one, tell me now. rodbyers@pinehillwineworks.com

Annual Fees Are Due Now.

**Please mail your
membership dues check**

for \$65 to:

**SWGGA, P. O. Box 1264,
Grass Valley, CA, 95945.**

**or bring a check with you
when you come to the
March Meeting**

All dues are due by April 1st.

On May 1st we will adjust the
membership list accordingly.

If you want to remain a member
please pay your dues.

2024 Calendar

Social Time starts at 6:30 p.m.
The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m.

March 21st,
Ponderosa Hall
Vineyard Talk

April 18th,
Ponderosa Hall
What Should I Do Next
With My Wine?

Remember, Social Hour starts at 6:30. Meeting starts at 7:00.

March Meeting Thursday, March 21st, Ponderosa Hall



Vineyard Talk with Gerard Van Steyn

Gerard has been making wine since 2005 and has a Cabernet-based Bordeaux vineyard, along with an orchard of 60 fruit trees in the Bay Area.

In 2021 they purchased property in Nevada County, planting a second vineyard. As a grape grower Gerard subscribes to the regenerative ag philosophy of farming believing that the diversity of microbial life in the soil is hugely important to the health, vigor, and flavor of the resulting grapes.

Gerard spends a lot of time learning about regenerative agriculture. At the March meeting he will update us on what is new in vineyard agriculture. Here are some topics he intends to hit.

Powdery Mildew

An update on UC Davis Field Research concerning new or improved spray material and tank mix options. Discussion of the main options regarding dormant and early sprays including lime, sulfur, and mineral oil.

Our soil improvement update.

A visual comparison and discussion of our soils in Grass Valley at purchase and now 3 years later.

Quick pruning info and ideas, from France

Could trunk disease be from pruning, and eutypa just an opportunistic disease that comes in after sap flow damage?

Petiole Tissue Analysis

One of the best/easy investments into better grapes, healthier vines, and to fix nutritional deficiencies.

In Case You Missed It . . . February Meeting . . . by Bernie Zimmerman



The February meeting began with members playing the wine game. Rod Byers had blended additives into four bottles of Dave Elliott's Syrah, and we were to guess which bottle was acidic, which was oaky, which was bitter and which was tannic.

Rod next led us through a structured tasting of a Rosé of Merlot, which concluded with his providing the tasting sheets to the unidentified winemaker.

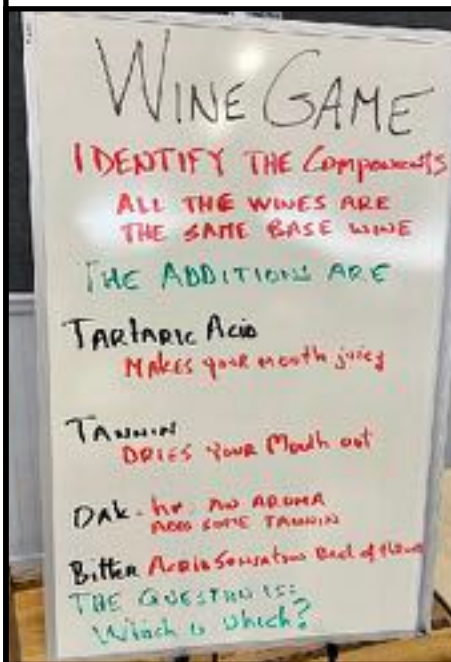
Rod then interviewed Scott Siver, a winemaker. After graduating from UC Davis, he worked for Gallo, for a winery in Australia and for several wineries in California including Artesa. He provided many interesting insights into the winemaking business. I learned that Gallo has been routinely buying smaller upscale wineries, such as Rombauer and Ravenswood, but largely leaving them alone. European interests are moving away from buying into Napa, preferring eastern Washington.



Continued on next page.

Photos by Bernie Zimmerman.

February Meeting Continued from previous page.



There is a glut of wine on the market meaning two things. Much good wine is being discounted to blenders who are repackaging it under their labels. And there is talk of cutting 20% of some vineyards to reduce output. There was an extended discussion on whether bad wine can be fixed, and if so how to do it. As for Scott himself, he hopes to open a winery in Nevada County in the next year or two.

This from Al Schafer, our Social Director.

As you know, we provide minimal munchies for the social time preceding our programs. If you would like to contribute to the snacks please contact me with notice of your contribution. We try to plan for them in advance.

You can reach me (530) 271-0766 or at afsarch@sbcglobal.net

Thank-you to all the members who have contributed tasty appetizers and treats in the past. Thanks. Al

Petiole Tissue Analysis Sample From Gerard Van Steyn

“Also, I attached one of our petiole reports with recommendations. This was for our Petite Verdot vines which were growing poorly, and we had no idea that they were magnesium deficient, even though our soils have excess magnesium” Gerard.

Test Description	Result	Units	Optimum Range	Graphical Results Presentation					
				Deficient	Low	Ample	High	Excessive	
Macro Nutrients									
Total Nitrogen (Leaf)	2.48	%	3.5 - 4.5	Deficient					
Nitrate-Nitrogen (Petiole)	ND	ppm	500 - 1200	Deficient					
Phosphorus (Petiole)	0.45	%	0.25 - 0.60						
Potassium (Petiole)	3.42	%	1.5 - 4.5						
Calcium (Petiole)	1.18	%	1.5 - 3.5						
Magnesium (Petiole)	0.138	%	0.40 - 1.5	Deficient					
Micro Nutrients									
Zinc (Petiole)	68.7	ppm	26 - 100						
Manganese (Petiole)	88	ppm	25 - 500						
Iron (Petiole)	19	ppm	30 - 200	Deficient					
Copper (Petiole)	5	ppm	7.0 - 25						
Boron (Petiole)	27.7	ppm	30 - 100						
Sodium (Petiole)	0.020	%	0.010 - 0.15						

Good Problem
 Note: Color coded bar graphs have been used to provide you with 'AT-A-GLANCE' interpretations.

Fertilization Recommendations

Nutrients	Lbs/Acre	via	Nutrients	Lbs/Acre	via
Nitrogen	25	Soil	Zinc	1	Foliar
Phosphorus	None	Soil	Manganese	1	Foliar
Potassium	None	Soil	Iron	2.5	Foliar
Calcium	10	Soil	Copper	1	Foliar
Magnesium	25	Foliar	Boron	0.200	Soil

In light of the program for the March meeting, it is never too early to start studying up on the topic.

The following are excerpts from Kiss The Ground, A Guide To Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture practices vary by region, context, and history. The following methods are aspects farmers and ranchers can adopt that might be suited to their land's story.

NO-TILL If we're practicing conventional farming, we are tilling a lot, which means turning the soil over. Tilling breaks up the soil aggregates and disturbs the organic matter while exposing it to oxygen. Once it oxidizes, the carbon and oxygen form CO₂, which then enters the atmosphere. So, tilling can be a problem.

Context is key when it comes to tilling. You'll hear plenty of enthusiasts preaching "no till" agriculture, and while this may be the ideal for low disturbance agriculture, it's often not the reality when you're facing land that's been mistreated for centuries.

While minimal tillage is best long-term, there are obvious short-term benefits to tilling. For example, a farmer could do a one-time tillage event that will create the yield she's looking for for years to come. Or, a rancher may plow just once to break up a resistant hardpan so their cover crop will germinate. When it comes to tilling (or not tilling) your soil, context is the most important factor – no scenario is identical.

COVER CROPPING Cover cropping is an effective way to nourish the soil. If a farmer's goal is to try and have living roots in the soil for a live plant above ground photosynthesizing, then cover crops play an important role in keeping the soil covered, and well-fed by the plant exudates.

When you're walking through untouched nature, is the soil bare? Unlikely. Perhaps it would be bare after a fire or natural disaster, but generally speaking, the soil is always covered. This is important because the soil is a living organism, acting as a home for many other microscopic and macroscopic organisms. These organisms need a food source and protection to survive, and with bare soil, this is not viable.

Cover cropping enhances the food chain. When the soil is bare, larger organisms that eat tiny microbes don't have anything to eat and starve. For example, farms that have bare soil can't support earthworm populations, mainly because their food source— microorganisms —is missing. Employing cover crops when not growing your cash crop is a great way to keep your soil fed.

What do you want to have in a cover crop? Again, it depends on the land and the farmer. Some experts advise gathering at least four different plant families, or eight different plant species, at different heights and leaf sizes. For example, avoid having all species from just the legume family.

COMPOST Most farmers or growers wanting to use compost have damaged the microbes in their soil. A good start is with a small dose of compost through an extract, meaning you add compost to water, and dilute it plenty. Farmers can also inoculate their seeds – coat them or put in a little dilution drip around them, which is similar to putting a probiotic around the seed. Compost speeds up the germination process. Seeds are amazing in their own way. Somehow they know when to germinate, which then produces exudates, feeding the soil microbes. It has its own internal microbiome inside the seed itself, and those start multiplying. With a little bit of compost extract, a farmer can make the microbiome more diverse, which will then help with nutrient acquisition and protect the plant from other diseases.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING Within a regenerative grazing system, rather than releasing thousands of animals on a vast piece of land, a rancher will fence them into a smaller section to impact it heavily for a short duration of time. In this small section, animals poop and pee, distribute seeds and break up the soil's crust, each of which benefits soil biology over time. Finally, the rancher doesn't allow them to return for some time, so the grasses can return to a select length.



Meet The Members

Forward To The Land

Victor and Michael Hildebrand-Estrada

You all remember back to the land. Well, here's a story that is all about forward to the land. And none of it is much about wine.

It's all about CASA. And before you go overthinking that, CASA, in this case stands for Crooked Arrow Sustainable Ag. Their new home turf.

Victor and Michael were living in Sacramento. Victor worked inside the Sacramento government system. Michael is a nurse. Wanting a semblance of a rural lifestyle they developed their residential house as much as possible into a mini-farm cultivating a garden, grape vines and fruit trees.

Around 2019 they decided it was time to leave Sacramento, start looking for their dream property. They had a very specific vision in mind: a nice house, five-acres of usable, irrigated land including pasture space. Plus room to store a boat and a trailer. They started looking in Amador County. 50 properties later they found themselves in Nevada County. It was never about the place as much as it was about finding the right property.

They moved just as COVID was stalking. Shut down. No getting to know the community. But even as COVID closed larger avenues it also opened up smaller ones. Victor and Michael started having pot lucks just to bring the neighbors together so they could all get to know each other.

In the meantime they settled right into country life, raising their own chickens, turkeys, pigs, and lambs. They harvest two dozen eggs per day, more in the spring. They leave them in a cooler at the bottom of the driveway, for neighbors to take on their way home.



It's kinda their thing. Raising and growing nutritious food to feed the community. They donate to the food bank and also sell in a local farmers market.

They dove head-first into community events like participating in Victorian Christmas. Michael is pretty handy with a crepe wheel and turns out a good crepe. He is looking into becoming a commercial crepe maker in Nevada City. Watch for that.

What about wine? And why join SWGGA?

They explained that it all started when they met Diane in 2023. "She told us about her vineyard, invited us to come over to participate in the harvest, crushing and pressing grapes. It all seemed very cool and fun."

All part of the lifestyle.

So much so that they went right over to Ray Frescas' vineyard next door and brought home temperanillo grapes for their first ever attempt at winemaking. Plus they have brought home grape cuttings which they are rooting in their barn.

"I intend to plant about an acre of vines rooted on their own roots," Victor explained. "SWGGA is a great place to learn about and get better at both winemaking and grape growing."



Dave Elliott Wins Winemaker's Choice Award Best Red Wine

Oh What A Night

Don't know if you have ever had the chance to go to one of the monthly Wine Group evenings at Lake of the Pines. It's a tough ticket. I was there last night (March 5) with Dave Elliott. Let me set the stage. Over 30 tables set up in The Club House, the room jammed with 200 people. More on the waiting list hoping for the chance.

Each month features a presentation, with wine, from a regional winery. Last night it was Kirchhoff Family Wines from Clarksburg.

In the meantime everyone is encouraged to bring their own wine to drink prior to the winery presentation. Debbie, one of our table mates, explained that for a while everyone brought a wine and then had to put it on a communal table for everyone and all to try. The problem with that, she explained, was that the quality of wine went down every month because everyone realized they were not going to be able to drink the wine they brought and who knows what everyone else might bring?

Things changed when they switched back to people bringing a wine to drink at their own tables. The quality of the wine went way up. It's not that wine lovers don't like to share, they do, but they also like to be part of the sharing experience. Dave and I did not know anyone at our table of eight but did try some of all of the six different bottles littering our table. Sharing like that is a motivation to bring something nice.

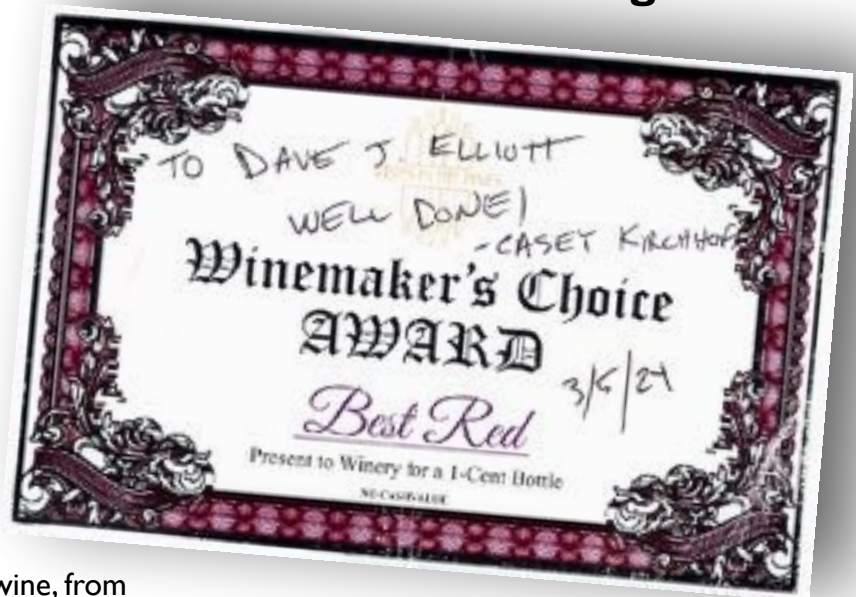
But it's not a competition. Or is it?

Well, kinda, sorta. As it turns out the representatives from the featured winery, in this case Emma and Casey Kirchhoff, go around the room visiting all the tables, looking for the best red and best white. Our table alone had three bottles of red wine on it. You do the math. 32 tables. How many bottles of red wine is that?

And who do Emma and Casey select? Dave Elliott. 2014 Syrah. Skydances Ranch. Alta Sierra.

Now, I do not know, but I would be willing to gamble that Dave's was the only non-commercially produced wine in the room. And there was some pretty nice wines on some of the tables. It would be like an amateur winning the U.S. Open. That is simply too cool for school. Congratulations.

Dave Elliott and Gary Glaze pouring their Gold Medal winning wines at the California State Fair last summer.





Can't Make Heads Or Tails Of It A Bourbon Tasting with Bryan Clapper

Not sure what I was doing there. I certainly did not know what I was doing, while I was there. It was eye-opening.

Bill Betts invited Dave Elliott and myself to join in a bourbon-blending session. We were at Bryan Clapper's house in Auburn. Bryan is the sole proprietor and distiller at his craft distillery he calls Longcreaux. He is street legal with a license. He is authorized to make gin. He makes two; Navy Strength and Vibrato. But that is not why we were there.

Bryan is working on a bourbon recipe. He had already done the distilling using a blend of grains in the process. We were there to pick the blend that would go forward into the barrel for an extended six-year aging process.

When I walked in there were 32 one-quart mason jars all labeled on blue masking tape. All were more than three quarters full of a crystal clear liquid with the transparency of water. Did not look like bourbon.

Basically, as I understood it, the liquid that comes off the still first, called heads, ranges from terrible to merely harshly awful. At the other end are the tails. Also not good but I forget for what reason. In between the heads and the tails is the heart, the best part.

You want the heart part be as big as possible so the question is how far can you go into either the heads or tails before you start picking up negative components from one end or the other. That is why we were there. To give Bryan some perspective.

The eye opening part for me was how foreign the territory felt to me. I felt extremely uncertain about every part of what I was supposed to be doing there. I don't know anything about distillation so the language was confusing to me. I felt lost in thinking about aromas, not sure what I was smelling, less sure about how to describe them. Finding the finish amidst the fire of the alcohol was new terrain as well. I was impressed with how everyone else in the room discussed the nuances, flavors, aromas, and finish. Mostly I tried to follow my own wine etiquette advice. When you recognize you are in over your head, talk as little as possible. It is much



Where the magic happens

better to listen to what some one else is saying and just nod appropriately at the right moments. They will think you agree with them and so then they will think you are smart too.

But that's not the point. The point is walking a mile in someone else's shoes. I am pretty comfortable around wine, can hold my own in most situations. But it is very refreshing to remember just how confusing wine can be when you don't understand the language, don't recognize the aromas, or don't know your way around a finish.

Now back to the bourbon. I have to say there was not much about it that tasted like bourbon to me but I have never tasted bourbon at that stage. Six or seven years from now will tell a much different story. I hope I get to taste it then.

Officers and Directors

President

Diane Houston
diane.houston

@managementtrust.com

Vice- President

Dave Elliott
djelliott

@skydancesranch.com

Treasurer

Lisa Whittet

lwhittet@sbcglobal.net

Secretary

Susan Clarabut

sclarabut@gmail.com

Social Coordinator

Al Schafer

afsarch@sbcglobal.net

Director At-Large

Gerard Van Steyn

gerardvsl@gmail.com

Director At-Large

Tom Martella

48vines@gmail.com

Program Coordinator

Rod Byers

rodbyers

@pinehillwineworks.com

Web Master

Jim Garrett

jim@relateddata.com

Trellis Wire Editor

Rod Byers

rodbyers

@pinehillwineworks.com

SWGGA SWAG

Check the website, www.swgga.org for product descriptions. Contact Susan Clarabut at sclarabut@gmail.com if you have questions, wish to check pricing, or, best of all, would like to make an order.

Vineyard Sign	\$57
Woman's Long Sleeve Shirt	\$35
Men's Short Sleeve Shirt	\$35
Apron - Sold Out -	\$21
Cap	\$18
Corkscrew	\$13
Wine Glass	\$3



Please Support Our Commercial Members

Gray Pine Vineyard & Winery

Lucero Vineyard & Winery

Sierra Moonshine Winemaking Supplies