

## WINE GRAPES IN AMADOR COUNTY - A PERSPECTIVE

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### CURRENT TRENDS

Zinfandel is the predominant wine grape variety grown in Amador County. The acreage currently reported by the California Crop and Livestock Reporting Service includes 843 acres of bearing vines and 243 of non-bearing vines for a total of 1,086. Other black grapes include Barbera, Cabernet Sauvignon, Mission, and Petite Sirah, but account for only 135 acres.

Although this cost study only covers Zinfandel, there has been a trend toward white varieties in recent years. Sauvignon Blanc accounts for most of the acreage (282 acres) with 231 acres yet to reach full production. Other whites planted in small acreages include Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, French Colombard, Muscat Blanc, Palomino, and Semillon. Total white grapes include 409 acres of which 364 are non-bearing.

### PRICES PAID 1982

Prices paid for Zinfandel in District 10 as reported by the California Department of Food and Agriculture in 1982 ranged from a low of \$175 to a high of \$576 per ton. The majority of tonnage - 32% - sold for \$425/ton. District 10 includes the counties of Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Placer, Nevada, Tuolumne, and Mariposa. Sauvignon Blanc prices ranged from \$400/ton to \$850/ton with most of the crop receiving \$700/ton (49.6%) or \$850/ton (34.4%).

### WINE GRAPES EARLY IMPACT

The recent expanded plantings of wine grapes continues a tradition which started soon after the Gold Rush of 1849. Some of those early vineyards survive today whereas others are but faint memories. Most of today's acreage is concentrated in the Shenandoah Valley - Fiddletown areas of North County - Ridge Road near Sutter Creek - and at Ione Valley. Historically, vineyards were also located at Plymouth, Amador City, Sutter Creek-Shakeridge, and in the Clinton District near Jackson.

Gold mining created a healthy economy and the interest in grapes and other horticultural crops increased toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Prohibition changed the marketing of Amador wine grapes. Many went to home winemakers. Trucks made it possible for the grapes to be delivered out of the county to Valley and Bay Area cities while others were sent to out of state markets in Nevada and Idaho.

Home winemaking also had an impact on the varieties planted in the "new" vineyards planted in the nineteen twenties. Growers often planted a mix of Zinfandel and Mission grapes which were blended by the home winemaker.

## UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA INPUT CAME EARLY

In 1876 Congress passed the Hatch Act which made an annual appropriation of \$15,000 to each state which would found and support an agricultural experiment station. When this federal money and program was accepted by the University of California Regents, three experiment stations were established. They were located at Jackson, Paso Robles, and near Visalia in the San Joaquin Valley.

Deeds show U.C. purchased three parcels of land near Jackson in 1890. Extensive plantings of olives, grapes, and other horticultural plants were evaluated. By 1906 all three field stations were abandoned because they were too far distant from U.C. Berkeley to properly manage and too small and poorly equipped to accommodate the desired research.

In 1905 the Legislature appropriated \$150,000 for the purchase of not less than 360 acres of agricultural land for the establishment of "The University Farm" known today as U.C. Davis.

Although the Jackson Experiment Station only survived 15 years, one can speculate that it must have had considerable effect on Amador County.

The location of the first field station at Jackson is also a good measure of the political strength of Amador County when gold mining was king.