



LODI WINE GROWERS

Coffee Shop Blog

20 GROWER-FRIENDLY MARKETING IDEAS



JANUARY 19, 2026. BY STEPHANIE BOLTON, PhD, LODI WINEGRAPE COMMISSION.

Growers, we need you to overcome your fear of sales, networking, and marketing to get through this challenging time. The Lodi Winegrape Commission and others are working around the clock to promote grapes and wine worldwide, building a bigger reputation than ever, but this is a particularly trying time that requires all hands on deck!

To help, I have **20 grower-friendly marketing initiatives** for you.

We grow a specialty crop (grapes) that turns into a value-added luxury product (wine). **We need people to enjoy wine in order to sell our grapes.**

Most consumers have no idea that vineyards exist all on their own, without a winery attached. Case in point: My lovely friend Amanda came to visit from the east coast. She told me that all she wanted for her birthday trip was to bike through vineyards. Easy – we rented bikes and strolled through vineyards. About 30 minutes in, she said “When are we tasting wine?” I said, “You told me you wanted to bike through vineyards!” We found her wine, of course, at a tasting room. But that was not what she asked for because she, like most everyone, did not understand the difference between a vineyard and a winery.

This separation of vineyards and wineries means that many farmers do not have a connection to the people who are enjoying the fruits of their labor, and it is taking a negative toll on the spirit of farming. This is happening throughout the world across many crops as corporations and a fight for money push farmers towards efficiency and large-scale agriculture.



The irony is that we have become so *very efficient on a global scale* that we are experiencing an extreme over-supply of both grapes and wine. Thousands of acres of grapes and millions of gallons of wines went unsold in 2025. This is hurting our farming families, this is wasteful, and we can do better.

From studying agriculture around the globe, I've observed that farmers feel most fulfilled when they are connected to people who enjoy and appreciate what they grow, when they are part of a farming community, *and* when their crop's supply and demand is in balance.

I believe that we can each do our part in turning things around for a more successful and sustainable future where we feel connected, confident, and profitable. We come from people who did just that in 1907 with the Tokay Carnival, when Lodi farmers switched from watermelons to grapes. Now is not the time to sit around and mope. It is time to do what is in our power for a better future! There are things we can be doing to help more people enjoy more wine and learn about the vineyard. Knowledge leads to wine sales. Wine sales lead to grape sales.

If we want to help sell wine to help sell our grapes, there are things we should be doing that are within our capabilities. Here are some of those things:



1. Buy wine and share it.

There are still SO many people in America who don't feel confident about buying, tasting, and drinking wine. Invite them into our world by sharing wine with them, especially people in their young 20's and 30's who will continue to enjoy wine for decades. Wine has a place on the dinner table and offers a path to deeper connection and deeper enjoyment of food, friends, and family. Open several bottles

and put two glasses per person out at dinner so you can serve a white and a red at the same time. Let people taste different varieties from different regions to discover what they like. Have fun with it!



2. Put out vineyard signs.

Put a sign out in your vineyard that tells the name of your vineyard, the grape variety, and which wines come from it. If you belong to a certification program such as LODI RULES, include that too. The planting date is also cool to include if you have an older vineyard.

3. Vineyard tech sheets.

Create a one-page sales sheet with all your vineyard stats, your story, your winegrowing philosophy, a beautiful photo and your contact info. Give it to your current grape buyers and any prospective buyers. This builds your confidence in knowing the soil type, sub-AVA, rootstock, and what makes your vineyard special.

4. Go to restaurant bars during off hours.

Sit at a restaurant bar, have a glass of wine, and talk to the bartender about the trends they are noticing with wine drinking. Thank them for their insight and for having a local wine on the menu (or if you grow a particular grape variety, thank them for that). Invite them for a vineyard tour and tasting. Leave a good tip.



5. Photography/Videography.

Take high quality photos and videos on your own or hire someone to take a few really good shots of your vineyard. These come in handy for marketing and may help you to see the beauty that already exists out there, especially right after a rain at sunset when the cover crop is bountiful! If you have any animals, remember to get shots of them too.

6. Instagram.

Join Instagram and post educational videos about life in the vineyard. Show the world what you are proud of and interact with the wine world. See what people are into and get ideas. Younger people would appreciate basic farm skills training through Instagram, for example.



7. Agritourism.

Invite people onto your farm for recreation, leisure, or exercise. Maybe these are wine consumer friends who would love to have a picnic. Maybe these are people who work in our wine-adjacent industries of restaurants, bars, and wine shops. Viticulture is my world and I still get excited when farmers invite me for a walk or a bike ride through their properties (especially if I get to pick elderflowers too!). Create a walking path and invite people out to enjoy it.

8. Make and carry a business card.

Create a business card, get it professionally printed (moo.com is my favorite), carry it around with you, and pass it out. If you are following along with these tips, you understand that we need you to get out of town and invite people back to your region for vineyard tours and wine tastings!

9. Non-grape crops.

Most farmers I know have many other cash crops growing on their properties, even if they don't realize it. Invite people to pick your miner's lettuce. Bring figs to your grape buyers. Sell your non-grape crops at farmers markets or groceries so you can build a reputation that helps you stand out (you can sell your winegrapes as food too – we did it this summer and people LOVED it). Diversification is marketing!

10. Cover crop/hedgerow bouquets.

This idea comes from Madelyn Kolber. Make bouquets from your cover crops and hedgerows and take them to people who sell wine to say thank you for selling local wine. Bring bouquets to places where wine is sold with a note that says "From xxx Vineyard + the location". We use cover crop bouquets to promote sustainable winegrowing and they are a big hit.



11. Invite people to dinner.

Most growers I know eat very well and regularly incorporate home-grown or hunted food into their meals. The average person does not get this luxury. Invite wine industry folks who are more connected or more social than you are to dinner, and talk about your vineyard and your grapes in a positive way. Sit on the patio where they can see the vineyard if possible. Growing your network helps broaden your vineyard's exposure. Be sure to serve wine as in #1!



12. Send thank you cards.

Mail handwritten, genuine thank you cards to people who you think are doing a good job promoting wine, vineyards, and growers. They need support. This is a tough time for all of us and it is good to give them a boost while getting on their radar. Genuine compliments are a key form of marketing and sales (I learned this from the famous Dale Carnegie book). Ask them if they need help with anything.



13. Host a Vino & Vinyls night.

If you have children or grandchildren age 21 or over, host a Vino & Vinyls night for them and their friends. Let them play records and open tons of different bottles of wine so they can try different grape varieties and different styles. Teach them responsible tasting by having appetizers and water readily available. Have them help you open the wine bottles so that they learn how to do that. As a bonus, start the evening with a sunset vineyard walk! *Photo is of an actual Vino & Vinyls night at the home of Randy Caparoso with Stephanie Bolton (author), Christina Lopez, and Anna Delgado.*

14. Support local restaurants and groceries.

Dining out, ordering wine, and buying wine in stores is important. Support restaurants and grocery stores that buy local ingredients and local wines, and feature these on their menus. When you are there, tell them that you are a winegrower and thank them for selling local wine. A group of us dined at Chez Panisse in Berkeley during Zinfandel Week to show our support and left a handwritten thank you note with some Lodi gifts, including Randy Caparoso's Lodi! book.

15. Volunteer.

Volunteer somewhere you can meet people or connect to people who enjoy wine. Volunteer in a wine shop, help with winery tasting room events, or offer to help pour wine at charity events. If you are a Lodi grower, you can volunteer for a two-hour shift at the Lodi Wine Visitor Center. See for yourself what people are saying about wine to learn the market and the trends. You will be surprised!

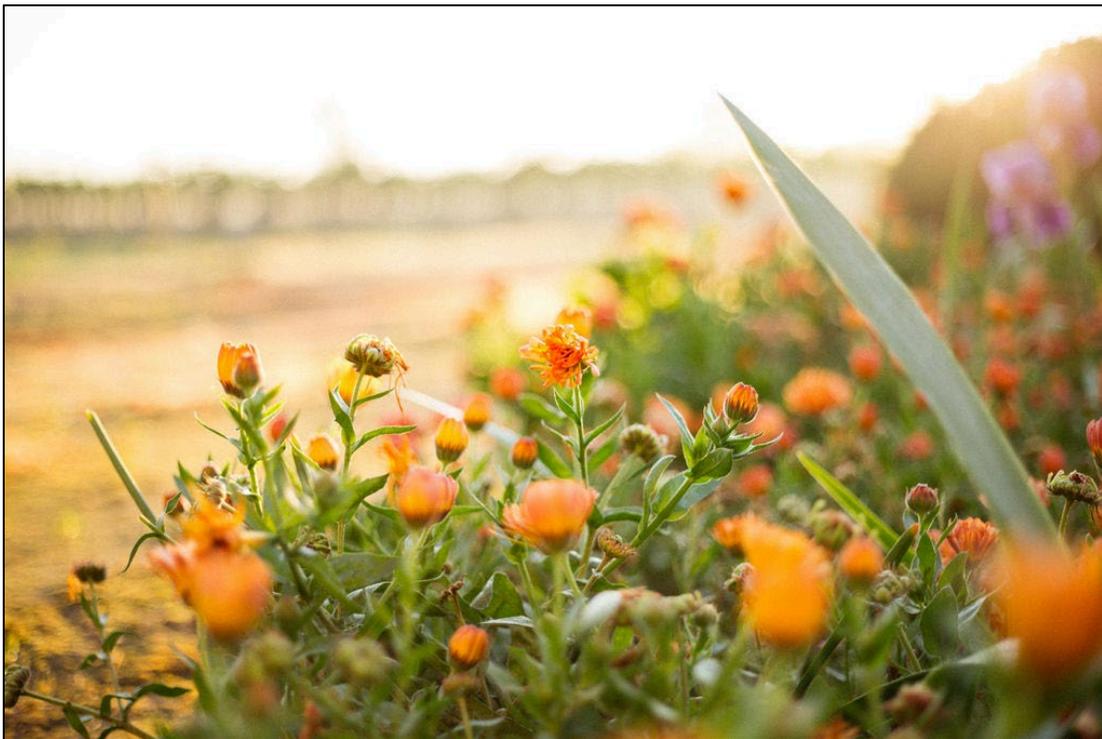


16. Get out of town.

Go to other regions and see what they are doing to get marketing ideas. Winters has developed an amazing small-town culture with tons of agriculture-adjacent events that attract tourists. Healdsburg is aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Big Sur has great inspiration for big views and wooden signage. Sonoma has an official farm trail. Visit Ruhstaller Farm in Dixon where they added a brewery and an event space, have a beer, and make some new friends. Bring your business cards (#8) and a wooden nickel (#20).

17. Talk to drivers.

When you are paying for a service, you have the most power to grab attention. Taxis, Ubers, and Lyfts are some of the best places to have wine-positive conversations and I do this all the time. This is America, so the driver almost always asks what I do for work. Once I mention wine, they perk up and I ask, "Do you like wine?" They typically say yes and I proceed to ask lots of questions to best offer tips on choosing wine they like, how fun wine is, and then I invite them to experience Lodi wine country. If they are in school or looking for a job, I tell them about the many agriculture careers that exist and offer mentorship that way too.



18. Plant flowers along your vineyard roadways.

Having your vineyard roadways look pretty to passersby is great marketing not only for you but also for your region. Make it eye catching and be sure to have that vineyard sign out from #2! Look for Xerces native plant kit giveaways each Spring.

19. Seek collaborations and partnerships.

Partner with people who are better than you are at networking and sales. Find people in your life with good business skills and foster a friendship. We learn a lot based on who we surround ourselves with. Bring some successful business people into your life! You never know – maybe your buddy who sails can pitch a custom wine for their yacht club made with your Cabernet, maybe a successful catering

friend needs an outdoor event location, maybe a photographer needs a barn for photo shoots.



20. Pass out wooden nickels.

We made you wooden nickels! Lodi growers can now get wooden nickels, tokens good for one free wine tasting at the Lodi Wine Visitor Center. The idea is that you will take these on trips and give them to restaurant servers, wine shop salespeople, and young people just learning about wine. There are so many restaurant and wine shop folks in Sacramento and the Bay Area who have no idea that they can sell sustainably produced wine. Wooden nickels are available at grower meetings and Lodi Winegrape Commission Board/Committee meetings.

How about for 2026, if you are a winegrower, you try at least three new ideas from this list. For all Lodi Growers and all LODI RULES Growers, I am available to support you in these marketing efforts if you reach out and ask.

You can make a difference, plus it is good for your brain and your spirit to try new things!

A special thanks to Natalie Collins and Mindy DeRohan of CAWG, Charlie Starr IV, Stuart Spencer, Jaclynn Stokes Iniguez, Madelyn Kolber, Randy Caparoso, Christina Lopez, Anna Delgado, and Nuffield International for contributing to this article.

Read more viticulture blogs at lodigrowers.com.