

The 2006 wine grape harvest is in full swing in Monterey County. While the warmer California grape growing districts like Napa, Sonoma, and the Central Valley have already wrapped up their *vinifera* harvest, much of cooler Monterey County is just now hitting full stride.

All Monterey County winegrowers' yardstick is their particular proximity to the climatic influences of Monterey Bay. Typically, lingering morning fog burns off by late morning to allow for warm sun in the middle of the day, with the fog and winds returning to cool off the late afternoon. Grapevines in Monterey County tend to produce buds in early spring (about two weeks *earlier* than other regions) and harvest, which takes place in the fall, typically begins two weeks *later* than other regions.

But this normal blueprint for the area has been pushed back even further with the 2006 harvest. The large amount of spring rain and cool temperatures earlier in the year had a big impact and are a reminder that every vintage is different. Many growers who typically begin harvesting in September didn't start until early October. Three well-respected growers gave their input on the harvest so far...

### **San Bernabe Vineyards**

San Bernabe is located in the southern portion of Monterey County. Bill Petrovic, Vice President of San Bernabe Vineyards comments: "In general, the harvest yield is turning out to be better than anticipated. Quality is excellent throughout the varietal mix with the reds showing early fruit flavors. The sugar, pH and total acid ratios are in excellent balance with roundness in the palate developing earlier than usual in all varietals. The yields will be down compared to average, but not as drastic as anticipated with quality being excellent."

### **Pessagno Winery**

According to Steve Pessagno, Owner & Winemaker of Pessagno Winery, harvest began in early October in the central section of the Santa Lucia Highlands. He reports that the coolest weather conditions in the past ten years have delayed ripening by as much as four weeks. From July 28<sup>th</sup> to September 12<sup>th</sup>, a period of 47 days, the vines awoke to foggy mornings followed by moderately cool and windy afternoons.

Pinot Noir and Chardonnay crop size are slightly below average at Pessagno; however, quality and flavor of the fruit is running quite high. Barring any unforeseen adverse weather, Syrah will be harvested towards the end of October with excellent color and flavor. For those with patience, 2006 may turn out to produce some stellar wines, Steve believes.

## **Paraiso Vineyards**

Fittingly, down the road at Paraiso, Pinot Noir was the first varietal picked this year, with 2006 Crush kicking off there on September 25<sup>th</sup>. The 400 acre Paraiso estate anchors the southern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands appellation, a district that has built its reputation on raising world-class Pinot. Paraiso is sustainably farmed and sells grapes to many different vintners, besides being the source for its own label. And after more than thirty years of winegrowing there, the Smith family has seen just about everything.

“It’s been a very trying season - the spring rains and cooler-than-usual summer created a host of challenges, including botrytis,” according to vineyard manager Jason Smith.

“Happily, though, conditions seemed to right themselves late; our bunch counts are good and quality appears very high. Although, it definitely is a later-than-normal year - looks like I’ll still be picking Syrah into November...”