

California grape grower puts experience to work

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

Fifth-generation Sonoma County grape grower Steve Dutton knows a lot about stewardship of the land; his family has been farming in the county since the 1800s.

"My brother, Joe, and I never wanted to do anything else," he said. "We have always wanted to be farmers, we never had another job. We both worked on the ranch as teenagers, and started full time in 1987."

Dutton is a co-owner of Dutton Ranch alongside his brother, a business started by their late father, Warren Dutton, in the 1960s. Currently, they farm 1,400 acres — 1,200 acres of winegrapes and 200 acres of organic apples. He is also a partner in Dutton-Goldfield Winery with winemaker Dan Goldfield. The Sebastopol winery primarily produces Chardonnay and Pinot noir.

"Our days are long," he said. "In the spring and summer we work 10 to 11 hours, at harvest 13 to 15 hours, and in the winter eight hours."

All the grapes are hand-picked. The Pinot noir grapes are harvested at night, starting at 2 a.m. and finishing most days at 12:30 when the weather heats up.

"The 2017 harvest looks good so far," he said. "It's on track to be a good year."

Although he says Pinot noir grapes are hardest to grow, the varietal has gained in popularity, and the demand continues to grow, he said.

Grape growing has steadily evolved over the past 10 years because growers have a better understanding of which rootstocks and varietals grow best in each American Viticultural Area, he said.

He has some advice for someone considering a career



Sonoma County Farm Bureau

Steve Dutton, a fifth-generation grape grower in Sonoma County, Calif., has some advice for anyone considering a career in viticulture: Pay attention to detail.

in grape growing: "Pay attention to detail and grow the varieties that sell best from your AVA," he said. "For example, foreign competition is something we are aware of but not a real problem. We are fortunate to grow Chardonnay and Pinot noir in the Russian River Valley AVA. They both have a lot of demand."

He is also concerned about agriculture in general, serving as president of the Sonoma County Farm Bureau.

"It's important to me to keep Sonoma County as open space," he said on the organization's website. "It's important to protect agriculture and protect the right to farm. The Farm Bureau is the only entity fighting for property rights, farming rights, water rights

and to protect agriculture in Sonoma County while representing all agriculture."

He says challenges face not only Sonoma County grape growers but California viticulture in general.

"In my opinion, there are two challenges," he said. "A severe shortage of labor and over regulation of the agriculture industry."

Dutton has served on the county Farm Bureau board 13 years. For the last four years, Dutton also chaired the membership committee.

In his "spare time" he has served on the boards of Sonoma County Farm Trails and the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Foundation, where he is currently president.

Washington educates viticulturists

By SHERYL HARRIS
For the Capital Press

In Washington state, five college or technical school programs are available to launch students into careers in the wine industry. Once prepared, students can enjoy many careers in the industry.

Washington State University offers a bachelor's, a master's and a doctoral degree in viticulture and enology-related fields.

Courses are taught at the Pullman campus and at the Richland campus, where WSU has the largest research winery in the Pacific Northwest. WSU offers a major, minor, and certificate in Wine Business Management through the College of Business. Professional certificates are offered in viticulture or enology, each a one-year program with hands-on camps at Richland or Prosser.

Central Washington University's program offers a bachelor of science in Global Wine Studies and a minor in Wine, Trade and Tourism. Faculty-guided field experience throughout Europe is required. In the future, they hope to offer a Wine Trade Certificate and a Sommelier Certificate.

South Seattle College, through its Northwest Wine Academy, features Puget Ridge Winery, the only com-

plete operating winery at a college in Western Washington. Three professional certificate programs are offered: Wine Making, Wine Marketing & Sales and Food and Wine Pairing. The associates of applied sciences degree and the transfer degree (associates of applied science-T) cover the same three major areas.

Yakima Valley Community College offers degrees in Agribusiness, Food Technology, Vineyard Technology, and Winery Technology. Transfer degrees are offered in Associate of Applied Science Agribusiness, Associate of Applied Science Vineyard, and a Technology Transfer Degree. YVCC currently offers a professional certificate program in Wine Sales, but is in the process of adding two certificates (Vineyard Technology and Winery Technology) in collaboration with South Seattle College and Wenatchee College. Brad Smith, Certified

Sommelier II with the Yakima program, says all classes are available in the evenings, and all resources are available online.

He also says the program has nearly 100 percent job placement.

Walla Walla Community College's Institute for Enology and Viticulture includes a state-of-the-art winery at College Cellars and 5 acres of teaching vineyards. Students, under the direction of the Director of Viticulture, take care of these vineyards. Danielle Swan-Froese says, "WWCC is a Workforce Education program well known for hands-on experiences. We prepare students to work in the industry."

WWCC offers an AAAS in Enology and Viticulture, AAAS in Wine Business, AAAS-T Enology and Viticulture. An internship is required where students experience working in the college winery and one other.



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