



Courtesy CAFF

A crew member for Oak Hill Farm in Glen Ellen, Calif., assesses damage from one of the fires in California's wine country. As firefighters have gained an upper hand on the blazes, efforts have begun to shift to recovery.

Farms, vineyards assessing damage from wine country fires

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Farms in California's iconic wine country are either picking up the pieces or counting their blessings as crews gain an upper hand on wildfires that devastated the area.

Wine grape harvests quickly resumed in areas not affected by evacuations as fewer than 10 of the roughly 1,200 wineries in Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties were damaged or destroyed by the fires that began late Oct. 8, the San Francisco-based Wine Institute reported.

But some farms were hit hard, including about a half-dozen of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers' members whose diversified produce operations were "completely burned," said Evan Wiig, the organization's communications and membership director.

"It's been pretty devastating," said Wiig, adding that some other growers that didn't sustain fire damage haven't been able to access their properties to run irrigation.

"A lot of irrigated land did survive the fires," he said. "But if you can't get into your property to irrigate ... it's going to go to waste anyway."

Among those operations is Oak Hill Farm in Glen Ellen, Calif., whose 700 acres of produce and flowers nestled against the western slope of the Mayacamas Mountains sustained damage. Wiig has been trying to get the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department to allow farmer David Cooper and others access to the ranch to water the crops that weren't burned, he said. Cooper lost his home and a barn to the blaze.

Within the wine industry,



Photo CAFF

A barn and home at Oak Hill Farm in Glen Ellen, Calif., were destroyed by one of the wildfires that have devastated California's wine country. As people begin to return to properties and neighborhoods, efforts have begun to focus on recovery.

several vintners — including Signorello Estates and White Rock Vineyards in Napa and Paradise Ridge in Santa Rosa — reported on social media that their wineries had been destroyed.

And five vineyard properties totaling about 200 acres in the Potter Valley area of Mendocino County are known to have been damaged, according to the Wine Institute. But because of evacuations, some winery owners don't have access to their properties to learn their status, the organization notes.

"Right now we still have damage assessment teams gathering information," said Scott Ross, a spokesman for the state Office of Emergency Services. "We know there has been some loss (of wineries and vineyards), but we don't have specifics."

Napa County Agricultural Commissioner Greg Clark estimates there were 4,300 acres of vineyards in the fire zone, but that isn't a loss estimate, he said. He's heard anecdotally of vineyards losing drip tubing or

end posts and sustaining some injury to vines from heat exposure, he said.

"Before long we'll be starting to reach out to the industry to determine damage," Clark said. "For some, they won't know (the extent of damage) until bud break ... at the end of March or beginning of April."

Restricted access to properties and power outages have been obstacles, as some wineries were using backup generators and available workers to finish fermentations and other tasks, the Wine Institute reported.

While it's too soon to know if smoke has tainted grapes remaining on vines, smoke is not an issue for wine that is fermenting of has already been bottled, the institute explained.

The effort to tabulate damage comes as fire crews are tightening containment of blazes in the wine country that destroyed nearly 6,000 homes and killed at least 41 people — including a firefighter — as of Oct. 17, according to The Associated Press.

Washington hemp pioneer has crop, but needs market

State issues few licenses

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

An entrepreneur at the forefront of establishing hemp in Washington says that he has harvested his first crop but doesn't know what he'll do with it, underlining the unpredictable future for sober cannabis in the state.

Cory Sharp said that he figures he can store for a couple of years an estimated 70,000 to 80,000 pounds of hemp grain. He said he's trying to line up financing for a plant to make hemp-seed oil, sold as a nutritional supplement.

"It'll take millions to do it right," he said. "It's a lot of capital, and there are a lot of hurdles."

Sharp, owner of Hemp-Logic, oversaw last spring the first planting of hemp under rules set down by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. The rules carefully followed federal limits on cultivating hemp plants, which remain a federally controlled substance, even in states with legal recreational marijuana.

The grain harvested in Grant County by Sharp are viable seeds, so they can't cross state lines. They must be processed in Washington.

"We're out of harvest and trying to find homes for things," Sharp said. "We have to find a market before we do anything."

WSDA licenses hemp growers and processors, monitors the seed supply and inspects farms. So far, the state has issued six hemp licenses, including one to a Washington State University researcher and two to Indian tribes. Meanwhile, other states, such as Oregon, Colorado, Kentucky and Tennessee, have each licensed dozens of hemp farmers or processors.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington hemp entrepreneur Cory Sharp takes photos at a hemp planting June 6 in Moses Lake. Sharp said Oct. 9 that the hemp has been harvested, but he's still looking for a market.

WSDA says about 180 acres of hemp were planted this year. Once launched this year, the program was to be sustained by fees. But the fees have raised approximately \$8,100, while WSDA has spent \$146,000 on the program. WSDA says it's not feasible to expect fees to support the program and will ask lawmakers to appropriate \$287,000 from the general fund to continue it.

Sharp and hemp consultant Joy Beckerman said high fees are a problem and so are the restrictions.

Beckerman said she has a long list of proposals for changing WSDA's program.

"It's at a crossroads," she said. "We need to remove some of these barriers. ... We need more seeds in the ground."

One of Beckerman's proposals is to make sure a marijuana grow can't push aside a hemp farm. Under a current state rule, hemp can't be grown within 4 miles of marijuana. If a marijuana grow moves in the area, the hemp farm must go.

"I, unfortunately, have to tell people, 'Beware, don't go buy a farm,'" Beckerman said.

Although Congress authorized state-supervised hemp cultivation and marketing in the 2014 Farm Bill, the crop still faces regulatory uncertainty. Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and three other senators sent a letter to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions in June saying they were concerned that people involved in hemp programs are being denied banking services.

Idaho-Oregon bulb onion crop smaller, but prices are much higher

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

NYSSA, Ore. — The onion crop in the Treasure Valley of Idaho and Oregon will be significantly smaller this year but growers are seeing prices that are much higher than normal.

"Yields are definitely down and size is off a little bit but prices are significantly better," said Bruce Corn, one of the 300 farmers in the area who grow the Spanish bulb onions this region is famous for.

Most growers and shippers Capital Press spoke with said yields will be off 20-30 percent this year. Size profile is also off and fewer colossals and super-colossals, the largest bulb onion sizes, will come out of the region this year.

But prices are way up. For example, a 50-pound bag of jumbo yellow onions is selling for \$10-11 right now, up from \$5.50 to \$6 this time last year.

"As you drive around, there are a lot of empty bins," said Paul Skeen, president of the Malheur County Onion Growers Association. "The bottom line is prices are up

because there is a shortage."

Buyers from Mexico are purchasing a lot of onions right now and that's also impacting the market, said Snake River Produce Manager Kay Riley.

"The market is about as good as we've seen it for this time of year," said Riley, the marketing order chairman for the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee.

Corn said the higher prices mean grower returns will be much better this year, despite the smaller crop.

"Last year, we had incredible yields but low prices. There was no return after you paid packing charges and storage," he said. "This year

is significantly better that way."

Although this year's crop is much smaller than normal, quality is excellent, said Murakami Produce Manager Grant Kitamura.

"They are coming in in really good shape," he said. "They are beautiful."

Kitamura said it's likely the higher prices will hold throughout the year, which typically happens during a year with limited supply.

"You could see higher prices later; I don't know for sure," he said. "But I can't see them going down. Overall, we're hoping for a lot better year than we had last year."

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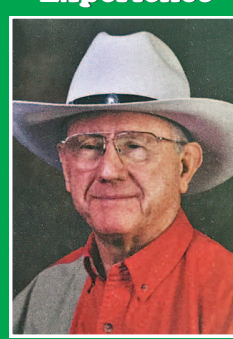
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