

Winemaker follows her love of grapes

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

Shasta County winemaker Brandi Greene affirms there is plenty of room in the California viticulture industry if newcomers have guts and a strong pallet.

"I'm seeing local students who have helped during harvest at my winery start college in viticulture and enology and that's wonderful," she said. "My relatives homesteaded as cattle ranchers in this area and southeastern Oregon generations ago so it feels comforting to know this is what I come from."

She said she "fell in love" with agriculture in the Food and Fermentation Science program at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

"The science is within the College of Agriculture so I experienced a lot of different parts of the industry from crop and soil science to helping in the meat processor on campus," she said. "I knew I fit in that world."

The realization that she wanted her own vineyard and winery was cemented after working for an Oregon Pinot producer. She saw the quality of the estate grapes and the

single vineyard grapes they used. It was a perfect expression of why she wanted to either grow her own or develop great relationships with trusted growers.

"Burnsini Vineyards opened as a commercial winery in 2000, but some of the vines were planted as early as 1987. That's not ancient by any stretch but for this area of California that is significant," Green said. "I love the annual progression of the vines, the race to harvest, and of course the calm after crush before it starts all over again."



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Mother Nature behaves, too. It's hot, very hot here in the summer, but there is a supply of water so she can focus on varietal expression and producing hearty wines. Achieving ripeness or early winter rains are never an issue.

"We grow five varietals — Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petite Sirah and Sangiovese — on 7.5 acres," she said. "Spanish varietals do well in this climate. I'm pretty excited about Sangiovese right now, from a California wine perspective it's an underappreciated wine."

"I fell in love with the grape in Italy years ago and was so happy to see it thriving in the North State," she said. "It's an easy grape to pick at harvest, pumps out the tonnage and handles our triple-digit heat with no complaints."

Greene said there isn't room on the property to expand so she is always eyeing property for sale with the idea that more vines are in the future. The local grape-buying market is small but increases every year so there may be some supplementing from other local growers at some point.

While Shasta County seems ideal for grape growing Greene said there are some thorny issues to deal with.

"It's hard to find us little guys amongst the big conglomerates," she said. "Getting noticed when you're outside the big name regions is tricky; but once they try the wine it's an easy sell."

The "know your farmer" concept has made people look at what they are drinking and realize they want to know more, she said. "I'm hopeful that will continue."



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