

OPINIONS

A sustainable wine industry in the Applegate

BY DARYL JACKSON

The face of agriculture in the Applegate has changed dramatically through the years, from rustic ranches carved from the forest to the more gentrified farms that exist today. And no change is more dramatic than the shift toward the flourishing wine industry. The wine industry is here to stay, and it is a tremendous benefit for the economy of this region.

Perhaps the most visible change is right in the heart of the Applegate. Turn onto North Applegate Road at the “town” of Applegate, and almost immediately you are next to the newest and undoubtedly the largest vineyard in the Applegate. There is a certain beauty to the view of many acres of new trellises awaiting the planting of grapevines, and no doubt the vista will be even more beautiful when the vines leaf out. Even more exciting are the progressive changes in sustainable viniculture.

Sonoma County in California is leading the way for a sustainable wine industry. The Sonoma Winegrowers Association is now approaching 50 percent participation into a new sustainability program. The growers and vintners there have learned that to maximize their profits they must adopt methods that ensure positive benefit to their community as well as the natural environment. An integral part of that policy is a shift toward herbicide- and pesticide-free agriculture. It is becoming quite clear that the sophisticated and well-informed wine consumer prefers organic, toxin-free wine.

Since many vineyards are located near pastures, hay fields, or roads, off-target movement of right-of-way and pasture herbicides is becoming a major issue in grape production. While these herbicides are used as tools for weed management, off-target damage to other crops as well as grapes often results in expensive fines and/or lawsuits, reduced yields, delayed ripening, and poor fruit quality.

Recently I paused next to some new vineyards when a large tractor spray rig stopped, opened a valve and dumped a large amount of chemical directly onto the ground. The operator was not wearing any type of protective gear as we both sat immersed in a cloud of toxic vapor. I couldn’t depart quickly enough.

So my question is this: if the vineyard was this bold about dumping toxic chemicals and lack of employee safety, what are we to expect in the future of this

operation and likely many others in the Applegate wine-producing industry?

Weed resistance to herbicides is an increasing concern in California vineyards; several weed species are reportedly resistant to the glyphosate-based herbicides commonly used in vineyards. Scientists at the Weed Research and Information Center (WRIC) at the University of California, Davis, report, “We’re seeing problems with glyphosate resistance, and we suspect we will see more.” Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Roundup; in vineyards it is commonly used to control in-row, under-vine weed growth.

Currently, most vineyards are sprayed with glyphosate two or more times during the year. Under the right conditions, volatile herbicides change from a liquid to gas or vapor and move away from the target. Recent scientific study has proven that herbicide drift can occur over *miles* rather than feet as was once assumed. Air stagnations such as the ones we routinely see with persistent fog allow this type of drift to stay in place for hours and days at a time.

Herbicides like aminopyralid and picloram, commonly used in vineyards, can stay active in soil, pasture grass and hay for a year or longer. When these forages are consumed by animals, the chemical passes through their digestive and urinary systems without change and into the manure and urine. It takes several days for aminopyralid and picloram to pass through the digestive and urinary systems of an animal.

Another characteristic to consider is water solubility. For instance, picloram is likely to be moved off-site by runoff. Since we all live in a watershed and consume these waters, it should be a great concern that herbicides and pesticides are being applied by the ton. The world-renowned Applegate fishery is particularly vulnerable.

Fortunately, preventive steps can be taken to avoid these problems. The Applegate wine-growing industry has a tremendous opportunity to be the showcase of environmentally sustainable wine production—a shift in that direction will ensure greater health to that economy as well as that of our region. If you get a chance, let your vintner or retail seller of fine Applegate wines know you prefer sustainably produced, toxin-free products.

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How government gets things done —whether you like it or not

BY JACK DUGGAN

This is a story about government: the local arm of a federal agency that impacts life in the Applegate. It is not about politics, since it takes place during three administrations. It is not about the environment, though its setting is the Applegate. It is about people: the people who make up the government (different from the politicians who supposedly determine what should happen) and the people who live here.

On January 15, 2015, John Gerritsma, field manager of the Ashland Resource Area of the Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), signed the “Categorical Exclusion Review & Decision Record,” project name: “Timber Mountain Trail Rehabilitation.”

Many readers of the *Applegater* are aware that the proposed Timber Mountain/John’s Peak OHV Area has been the subject of more than a decade of controversy. Neighboring landowners to the area learned that it was to be managed for OHV (off-road vehicle) use only when it was so designated in the 1995 RMP (Resource Management Plan). No written description or area map was included. The 1995 RMP limited OHV areas to “existing roads and trails.” No trails have been designated or officially adopted by BLM. The public first saw maps of the area in 2006 when BLM began a DRAFT Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) process. In response, more than 1,200 landowners, all registered voters, signed a petition to BLM asking them to remove the area as inappropriate for intensive OHV use.

Released in 2009, the DEIS received more than 500 critical comments. Attempts at mediation since, including a six-month Alternative Dispute Resolution process, produced no results. The DEIS has lain dormant ever since.

Now the government is using a CE (Categorical Exclusions)—an instrument intended to give agencies the ability to

move quickly when there is resource damage—to “rehabilitate/restore” 92 miles of OHV trails over five years. Many of the trails on the CE map did not exist in 1995. Some don’t exist at all. None legally exist because no management plan has been completed.

Landowners impacted by this proposal have dealt with trash, trespass, noise, fumes, threats, erosion and loss of privacy because of OHV use. Landowners have been shot at while on their own land.

Nonetheless, the proposal is promoted by BLM and Oregon State Parks and Recreation, and the local BLM wants to do this. The whole idea began when a BLM recreation coordinator, an active member of a local group promoting unlimited OHV use, got the area listed in the 1995 RMP. He now works for Oregon Parks and manages gas tax money given to this OHV group for enhancing their sport, including the buying of land. His successor as BLM recreation coordinator, in office when the DEIS process began, was also a member of this group.

Those of us who live in the Applegate and treasure our place, our homes, our privacy, and our natural surroundings deserve better than to be ignored by our government failing to act as a good neighbor.

The government works for us. We can change politicians every two years, but these government employees make decisions critical to our lifestyle and well-being, and yet they remain “in office” for decades. It is time they are held accountable.

Go to the Department of the Interior website (www.doi.gov) and/or send a message to the BLM Director (director@blm.gov). Write to John Gerritsma at Medford District BLM, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504. We, the people, should have an equal voice in how our neighborhoods are used.

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Burn reminder



Before burning outdoors any time of year, check with your fire district to make sure that day is an official burn day and not a **NO** burn day.

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