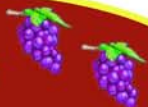


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SUISUN VALLEY
GRAPE GROWERS
ASSOCIATION



Solano grape growers seek well-deserved place in the sun

By Paul Franson

If you look at the facts, Solano's grapes and wines should be as famous as Napa's. The climate in Suisun Valley, for example, averages only a degree more than Oakville's, and the 8-mile-long valley is a microcosm of Napa's 30 miles. Both areas are highly influenced by the cool breezes blowing up from the Carquinez Strait. They have many similar soils and topographies.

Grapes have been grown in Solano County for more than a century, and the Suisun Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA) was recognized in 1982, soon after Napa Valley's AVA was approved. It and the adjacent Solano County Green Valley AVA are part of the North Coast AVA, just like Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino and parts of Marin and Lake counties.

So what does Napa have that Solano doesn't? For one thing, wineries. Solano has few wineries to spread its name, and none is large or well known.

Second is tourist appeal. Napa is an accessible, picturesque valley with natural and man-made attractions. But most of all, it's promotion and two words: Robert Mondavi. He has not only tirelessly promoted wine and his own winery but Napa Valley itself, making it recognized everywhere as a source of world-class wine. No other area in California—not even larger Sonoma with its excellent wines—has promoted itself so effectively.

Now growers in Suisun Valley are hoping to raise their profile. They've partnered with Turrentine Wine Brokerage to sell more grapes to California wineries. (Many of the area's growers already sell to well-known firms, but few in the industry are aware of it.) They've also hired a public relations firm, have a website (svgga.com) and some big plans. They're encouraging wineries to put Suisun Valley on labels, planning promotional events, and they have hired a consultant to prepare a soil and weather report.

The association is also trying to tie grape prices to the North Coast AVA and separate them from the grapes grown in the large, Central Valley-oriented growing area it's now in. Association president and grower Roger King adds they're well along in plans to add a shared tasting room to the new Glashoff sculpture gallery at Manka's Corner.

The area does need more wineries, however. Only two are open now, but King says the county is very supportive and open to more. It's an attractive, far less expensive alternative to Napa County, where it's very difficult to open a new winery, and impossible to open a public tasting room. •



North Coast AVA Map

Suisun Valley has 3,000 acres of vineyards in the 15,000-acre AVA, making it the same size as the famed Stag's Leap District in Napa Valley. Likewise, Green Valley AVA has 17,000 acres and about 3,000 acres of vines. Pope and Chiles valleys in the Napa Valley appellation are actually more like Suisun and Green valleys in climate, yet Suisun- and Green-Valley grapes sell for about one-third the price of those from Napa.

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