

Vineyard Region Review

A Look at Grape Producing
Regions Across America



California

Increasing Awareness of Suisun Valley

In an effort to advance awareness of the Suisun Valley American Viticulture Area, established in 1982, the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association (SVGGA) has engaged the services of Turrentine Wine Brokerage and Diaz Communications.

Located in the southeastern-most quadrant of Napa Valley, Suisun Val-

ley is an AVA comprised of 15,000 acres of Ultra Premium, wine grape farmland, 3,000 of which are planted to wine grapes. The climate of Suisun Valley is just one degree warmer than Napa Valley, and it experiences the same coastal influences of San Pablo Bay throughout the growing season.

Turrentine wine Brokerage will be using this message of Ultra Premium grapes in direct sales methods to their contacts. This service is available to all SVGGA members who want assistance in this direct sales promotion. Growers

will then negotiate individual contracts from developed leads under their own terms. Bill Turrentine states, "Turrentine Wine Brokerage has agreed to make a special sales effort for SVGGA. Many Suisun Valley Grape Growers are state of the art viticulturalists and are already selling to top flight brands." This will further the potential and development of Suisun Valley grape growers.

According to SVGGA President Roger King, "The long term direction of this approach ties in with our strategic plan of building the Suisun Valley AVA. We'll look at the results of this first year effort, and then build upon all the successful aspects. Having Turrentine, a reputable industry brokerage firm, communicating the Suisun Valley AVA to wineries will continue to build recognition for us, and will strengthen the appellation name of Suisun Valley."

Also new is SVGGA's new website. Point your browser to www.svgga.com. America's 17th AVA.

For the public, the site provides information with pages dedicated to appellation history, appellation facts, appellation map and accolades.

For the members, the site provides key data on the Member's Page, "Who the Growers Are" and a buyer/seller forum, e-commerce grape sales exchange.

Diaz Communications has also been hired to work with SVGGA's awareness campaign. "These are two large components of our first year tactical plan, to get our professional grape sales and our PR strengths in place for a major roll-out. This overall combination is the foundation for our forward movement as an Ultra Premium, wine grape growing region," stated Roger King.

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Appellated Wineries:

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Suisun group expands member services

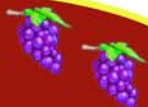
October 01, 2004

The Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association (SVGGA) has engaged Turrentine Wine Brokerage to promote its ultra-premium grapes via direct sales. The association also hired Diaz Communications to help build awareness of the AVA. For more information, visit the Web site svgga.com.

An organization whose members are committed to growing ultra premium wine grapes.

Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association * 4160 Suisun Valley Road, Suite E – 141
Suisun Valley, CA 95434 * www.svgga.com * info@svgga.com

SUISUN VALLEY
GRAPE GROWERS
ASSOCIATION



September/October 2004

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.



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.

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. •

www.svgga.com

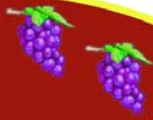
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SUISUN VALLEY

September 15, 2004, by MaryAnn Bovio: “Our diverse list includes 13 Zinfandel, 10 Pinot Noir, eight Cabernet Sauvignon, seven Merlots and a few Syrahs and blends. Many of these wines are from well-known appellations such as Russian River Valley, Amador County and Santa Barbara. **Others represent appellations you may not be familiar with, such as Suisun Valley, which is southeast of Napa; growers there have been selling Suisun Valley grapes to Napa and Sonoma vintners for more than 20 years.”**

www.svgga.com

Smaller grape yield could help vintners

Supply and demand in wine market should equalize

By Matthew Bunk

DAILY REPUBLIC - June 30, 2004

FAIRFIELD - What's expected to be a moderate wine grapes harvest this year could be just what the industry needs to start a recovery from dismal revenues that have plagued growers in recent years, industry experts said Tuesday.

Roger King, president of the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association, predicts a "slow climb out of the down period we've been in." It might only get slightly better this year, he said, but a lighter harvest could drain surpluses of many types of wine and lead to balance of production and demand within two years.

"It's not going to come in one fell swoop," King said, "But as we move into 2005 and 2006, it will be a vastly improved market for growers out here."

Banner years for wine grapes in 1999 saw per-ton prices of some grapes at highs of \$1,700. Overproduction gave way to lower prices in following years - the worst was 2002 when some fruit didn't leave the vineyards and tonnage prices dropped by about 30 percent - but King says he sees signs of recovery.

Those who sell wine say values for merlots and chardonnays should bounce back this year, but they have a much different outlook for cabernets and syrahs. Overplanting those

grape varieties has glutted the market, Ledge-wood Creek Vineyards owner Dean Frisbie said.

"As soon as something makes a little money, everybody goes out and plants it," Frisbie said. "Which is good because you want those folks to make some money. But what you get is overproduction."

King, a grower himself, said it could be several years before "cab grapes" return healthy profits for Suisun Valley growers. Of the seven types King grows, he's most skeptical about his cabernet grapes.

"Cab is the only one I have a problem with," he said. "I don't know where that one is going."

The season itself has jumped ahead of schedule, with many growers seeing their grapes turn colors ahead of the normal growing patterns. King said the harvest could come about three weeks early.

Warm weather woke up the grapevines in early March, King said.

"I guarantee you'll see grapes harvesting in August," he said "Whites will go out first and then I think you'll see the rest in early September." Harvest could be delayed if temperatures dip this summer, he said.

www.svgga.com



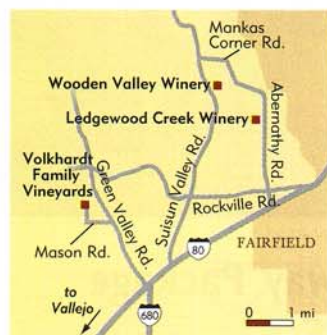
Hidden wine country

Just minutes off I-80, wind past the family wineries of Solano County

BY DAVE WEINSTEIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY CRABBE

Wild turkeys waddle across Mason Road as a single car makes its way toward Green Valley's Volkhardt Family Vineyards. Behind the winery, the hills rise steeply, leading to busy Napa Valley. But here in rural Solano County, the only other vehicle in sight is a tractor working the vineyards.



Valley finder

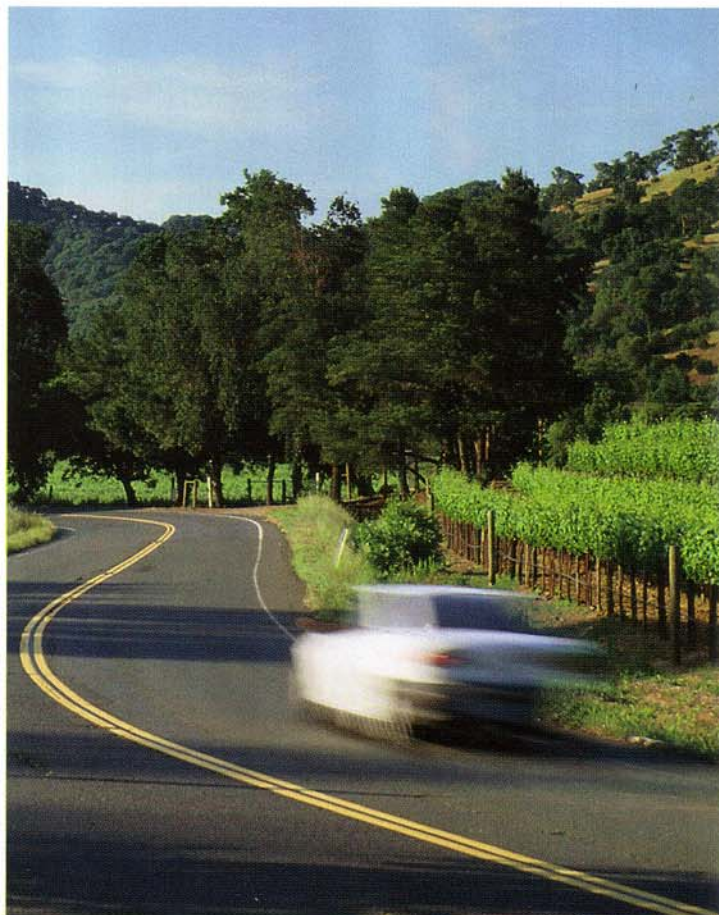
Take I-80 to Green Valley Rd., head north, and turn left on Mason Rd. Contact the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce (www.ffsc-chamber.com or 707/425-4625).

Volkhardt of Volkhardt Family Vineyards (11–5 Sat–Sun or by appointment; 1635 Mason Rd., Green Valley; 707/864-1107).

From Volkhardt's winery, it's just a few minutes' drive to Wooden Valley Winery (10–5 Tue–Sun; 756 Suisun Valley Rd; 707/864-0730). On your way, you'll pass 610-acre Rockville Hills Regional Park (\$2 per person; 707/428-7614) and the quiet, oak-shaded cemetery at the 1856 Rockville Stone Chapel.

At Wooden Valley Winery, which dates back to the end of Prohibition, vice president Ron Lanza boasts that hot days and cool bay breezes provide ideal conditions for growing wine grapes. The win-

Few drivers buzzing through Fairfield along Interstate 80 realize they're passing right by rolling valleys dotted with family farms and down-home tasting rooms. Green Valley and its neighbor Suisun Valley remain undiscovered and unpretentious—much as Napa was in the 1960s. “You don’t have the congestion of Napa, and it’s laid-back,” says Ben



ery's 2000 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon won a gold medal at the 2003 California State Fair.

The area's newest winery, Ledgewood Creek (11–5 daily; 4589 Abernathy Rd.; 707/426-4424), has a tasting room nestled among the vines, where you can taste not only Chardonnay and Merlot, but also Roussanne and Viognier.

At nearby Cal Yee Farms (8–5 Mon–Fri, 10–5 Sat–Sun; 5158 Clayton Rd.; 707/425-5327), they've been drying fruit for 80 years. Take the advice of Eva Yee Palm, matriarch of the Cal Yee family, and finish your day at the Vintage Caffé (\$\$; lunch Mon–Fri, dinner Tue–Sun; 2522 Mankas Corner Rd.; 707/425-3207). “It’s like one of those fancy restaurants in Napa or Sonoma, only better,” she says. *

Farm country scenes: rural Suisun Valley Rd., the Rockville Stone Chapel, and vineyards stretching to the hills.

As seen in... The Sacramento Bee

Suisun Valley ready to make its mark in winery circles

November 5, 2003

Section: TASTE

Page: F9

By Mike Dunne

Bee Food Editor

DUNNE ON WINE; Sidebar also on page F9.

—One moment you're zipping along Interstate 80, approaching Fairfield, almost halfway between Sacramento and San Francisco.

Out the windows, about all you see are gas stations, fast-food joints, the massive hulk of the Budweiser brewery and an occasional cargo jet lumbering into Travis Air Force Base.

But within minutes, you can be tooling along a narrow country road lined with stately churches, produce stands and vineyards. Without fanfare, you've entered Suisun Valley, a historic but underappreciated California wine region, now eager to claim its place on the dinner table and in the minds of people who like to tour tasting rooms.

There are only two tasting rooms now, but the area's grape growers and winemakers are working industriously to raise public awareness of this pastoral enclave at the southern reaches of the more celebrated Napa Valley.

The climate is similar, the soils are similar, and for years Napa Valley vintners have been buying Suisun Valley grapes and blending them into their wines, so several of the valley's 44 growers reason, why shouldn't Suisun's farmers reach for a bit of that glory for themselves.

Toward that end, they formed the **Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association** this summer and now are pondering how they can let wine enthusiasts know about Suisun Valley.

"We all know that grapes from this valley are sitting on store shelves under the Napa label," says Ron Lanza, one of four brothers who with their father, Richard, own Suisun Valley's landmark Wooden Valley Winery and Vineyards.

(OK, so if it's in Suisun Valley, why is the winery named after Wooden Valley, just to the north? When the winery was founded in 1932, the road out front, now Suisun Valley Road, was named Wooden Valley Road.)

Suisun Valley has been an official American viticultural area since 1982, gaining the recognition just a year after Napa Valley. About 6 miles long and 2 miles wide at the widest, it encompasses about 15,000 acres, approximately 3,000 of which are used to grow grapes.

Though wineries periodically have flourished in the valley since at least the late 1800s, they haven't been numerous or particularly interested in developing a following beyond the immediate area. Even today, Wooden Valley Winery sells 90 percent of the 15,000 cases it produces annually right out of its tasting room.

Historically, pears have been the valley's principal crop, but they're declining, though tree branches from one pear orchard still brush the walls of Wooden Valley Winery.

Plantings of wine grapes in Suisun Valley expanded steadily during the past 20 years and surged especially during the 1990s, as they did in the state's other agricultural districts.

Large corporate wineries in Napa and Sonoma wanted grapes for the three hottest varieties - cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and merlot - and that's what Suisun's growers tended to plant.

Now California's wine trade is saddled with an oversupply of grapes, especially those varieties, so Suisun Valley farmers are re-evaluating their vineyards and in some instances converting to varieties that may be more suitable for the local climate and soils.

"Just about every variety you can think of is being grown here now," says Roger King, president of the **Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association** and owner of Ledgewood Vineyards.

The oversupply of fruit and a subsequent dip in demand for Suisun Valley grapes by large wineries also is behind the drive by Suisun Valley farmers to raise the area's profile as a wine region.

Toward that end, they're encouraging vintners who buy their fruit to note on their labels that the grapes are from Suisun Valley, and their appeal is having some success as "Suisun Valley" appears on more bottles arriving at restaurants and stores.

"We need to change our image from being a supplier (of grapes to others) to being a producer (of wines)," says Ron Lanza. "We need to get that name 'Suisun Valley' out there."

Small specialty vintners from outside the area, such as Sunset Cellars of Alameda, Thomas Michael Cellars of Napa and Olabisi Wines of Calistoga, have started to release varieties such as petite sirah, zinfandel and syrah with a Suisun Valley appellation.

Local growers also are hoping to see more wineries build in the valley, but so far just one other producer, Ledgewood Creek Winery & Vineyards, has opened.

The Lanza family, however, plans to break ground next spring for a winery that will more than double its production capacity to 40,000 cases a year. It will be just up Suisun Valley Road from its existing winery, and when the relocation is completed the operation will be renamed Lanza Family Vineyards.

Because Suisun Valley is largely unrecognized as a fine-wine region, its wines tend to be modestly priced, which Lanza, King and others figure will give them an edge in today's market.

“This is the intersection of quality and value,” says Douglas Sparks of Sunset Cellars. “The quality here is improving fast, but we still offer value.” His Suisun Valley wines are priced around \$15, while Wooden Valley’s generally are under \$10 and Ledgewood Creek Winery’s are in the \$12 to \$15 range.

As a measure of vintner confidence in the area’s fruit, however, Olabisi Wines is releasing a meaty and lush syrah for \$30 and a novel unoaked petite sirah for \$35, both of which carry the Suisun Valley appellation.

“This is just like the Seabiscuit story,” says Olabisi’s Sonny Thielbar. “We’re the little winemakers that could. People want to believe it can happen, and it will.”

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The Bee’s Mike Dunne can be reached at (916) 321-1143 or mdunne@sacbee.com.

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Solano Growers Form New Association

July 25, 2003

Wine grape growers in California's Suisun Valley AVA are forming the **Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association**. Suisun Valley was one of the first officially-recognized AVAs.

The organization has established a nine-member board of directors, elected officers and is filing paperwork to establish a non-profit association under an adopted set of by laws. The group is also seeking funding through the Suisun Valley Fund, created in 1974 by joint agreement between the **Solano Irrigation District** and the City of Fairfield to preserve agriculture in Suisun Valley. The key association objective is brand development of the Suisun Valley appellation.

Located immediately south of Napa County, the AVA encompasses approximately 10,000 total acres.

If you would like to view this article, go to
www.winebusiness.com