

## **A Quick Look Back**

25 January 2003

It's difficult to cover 50 years of relevant history to LDGGA in just a few minutes and since I don't have a power point presentation, I risk losing many of you. I'll try to make the next few minutes of some interest. There are many of you here tonight who have seen as much or more than I have of how things have changed over the years. One thing that has changed since I first started, as a farm advisor is everyone used to be older than I; now about half of the growers are younger!

I think I was mainly to talk about my perspective of the changes in winegrowing business and research related to it. As I searched for some info I learned a little more about Cooperative Extension and its history in the county. Flame Tokays were introduced in the 1860s and became well established just after the turn of the last century (how about that for change?). Not too long after the reputation of Lodi was already recognized, the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau was established in order to be eligible for an Extension office. That was in 1914, when 600 growers slightly more than the minimum 20% required, voted to establish a Farm Bureau. I did find a mention that only 400 growers had paid their one-dollar dues, but an Extension office was approved anyway. The first Farm advisor was Frank Lyons. He served until 1917 and resigned for unstated reasons. Ralph D. Robertson followed him. He unfortunately died from the Influenza epidemic of 1919. J.W. Adriance answered grower questions until 1928, when he retired and O.V. Patton then made the farm calls, conducted education, and organized labor availability for the area's growers. How about that for service! In 1943 Mr. Patton died after returning home from a long day.

Clark Swanson covered the grape growers' calls along with all tree crops, until 1947 when he returned to the family farm in Escalon. For two years, Loren A. Estabrook was responsible for viticulture calls and research until 1949. Gordon F. Mitchell then filled the job of horticultural advisor with an emphasis on grape production until 1958, when he took a position as a pomology specialist at U.C. Davis. During Mr. Mitchell's time the Grape Institute (Lodi Grape Day) was started, the LDGGA came into being and various research projects in vine nutrition, pruning, nematodes, phylloxera, other pests and irrigation. In 1958 James J. Kissler came aboard and helped the Lodi growers establish the well respected reputation of the district as innovators and leaders in both the wine and table grape communities. With the help and encouragement of the LDGGA, Jim conducted some of the most farsighted and comprehensive education/research programs in the state. He was responsible for nitrogen management studies in Tokays, irrigation needs and strategies of furrow and sprinkler irrigation, new varieties, resistant rootstock trials, propagation techniques, and the evaluation of trellis systems, among many other trails. And he was instrumental in introducing machine harvesting to the state in 1967. During Jim's tenure we saw many changes become standard practice.

In 1986 Jim retired after 29 years, the longest anyone probably will have the privilege of being a San Joaquin county Farm Advisor. I was worried there wouldn't be anything left to do. Well a few other problems are still coming along and a few more questions need to be answered. But I do have the distinct advantage of working on a solid foundation of information, respect and trust

that he developed with you and the LDGGA. Jim gave a nice overview of his experience for the 50<sup>th</sup> Lodi Grape Day last year.

From the grower perspective when the LDGGA was formed in 1952, there were 34,750 acres of wine grapes in the county (13,547 Zin and 7,836 of Carignane and 5,306 of Alicante Bouschet). There were 22,613 acres of Flame Tokay (all in Lodi) with 5,704, 355 lugs shipped. Today there are 19,930 acres of Zins; 14,314 of Chardonnay; 11,837 of Cabernet Sauvignon; 7,588 of Merlot; 2,237 of Sauvignon blanc and 1,581 acres of Syrah. Only 1, 625 acres of Carignane remain along with 108 Alicante Bouschet and Tokays are below 1,793 acres and falling! Although the economic demise of the Flame Tokay continues, its historical significance and local impact are evident in the two high schools: the Lodi Flames and the Tokay Tigers.

In 1952 it cost \$252.59 (\$6,053 in 2001) the first year to establish a new vineyard; when a dollar was a dollar. By the third year total cost was about \$562.95 (\$10,967 today), as the first harvest yielded fruit. Grape prices average between \$28.50 and \$35.00 per ton. In 2002 we unfortunately revisited those nostalgic returns.

The biggest viticultural changes I've observed begin with irrigation, pesticides and nitrogen use. It wasn't too long ago that 30 to 48 acre inches of water were applied in a season. Even though there have been a few dry farmed vineyards locally, the average vineyard seems to be approaching about 12 to 18 acre inches. An acre-inch is equivalent to an inch of rainfall. Pesticide applications have gone from regular calendar sprays to a limited amount of mildew applications or sulfur dustings. Many new materials are applied in ounces or grams per acre instead of pounds per acre. Nitrogen use of 50, 60 or 100 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre have gone to 25, 15, 10 pounds or even less. Drip irrigation was used on 10 or 15 % of vineyards now accounts for 90% or more vineyards. And of course trellising, machine harvesting and general vine vigor have all changed.

Local research and proactive growers have fostered these gradual, but big changes. These practices have resulted in slightly lower yields; the county average was 6.9 tons per acre in 2001 compared to 8 tons per acre in 1952. The quality of fruit and the recognition of wines have been the biggest change and one of the most important goals of growers and vintners alike. Just after WWII there were 36 wineries in the area, with more than half a dozen-grower cooperatives. After many years of declining numbers there once again are more than 27 wineries with more in planning stages. Part of that long transition saw the closing of the last grower cooperative winery in the state this past year. Fortunately the efforts of the LDGGA and the LWWC (which came about from the interest of a group of LDGGA growers) promises better things to come.

With that I better close. There are too many individual growers that I should thank and simply thank you as an organization for your financial support, your moral support and for your unselfish and farsighted investment in research and education.

Paul S. Verdegaal  
Farm Advisor

California Fruit Distributors	1901-1926
Lodi Growers and Shippers League	1919-1924
California Vineyardists Association	1926-1929
California Grape Control Board	1930-1932
Tokay Marketing Agreement	1940-1995 July 31
Lodi District Grape Growers Association	1953-present
California Association of Winegrape Growers	1974-present
Winegrowers of California	1984-1987
Lodi Appellation (AVA) approval	1986
Lodi Woodbridge Winegrape Commission	1991-present
Lodi Appellation Winery Association	1999-present

*Source: Lodi News Sentinel, 29 June 1921, 5 Oct 1923, 5 Jan 1924*