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**CONTACT:** John Segale  
916.600.1081

## **SWIFT, UNEVENTFUL SONOMA COUNTY WINEGRAPE HARVEST IS A WELCOME CHANGE AND MAY SIGNAL RETURN OF MARKET BALANCE**

Hopes for Long, Wet Winter Follow Near Perfect Growing Year

**SANTA ROSA, Calif. (October 13, 2021)** – Grape growers around the county are breathing a sigh of relief as the 2021 harvest season closes out this week blessed by Mother Nature after the past few challenging years. In a year best described as a “cold start to a warm, fast finish,” reports from throughout Sonoma County indicate that the harvest was a little early, the grape yield appears to be slightly lighter to average yet the 2021 crop will be viewed as an excellent vintage. Equally encouraging is that the winegrape market is in much better balance than in past years.

“It has been near perfect for growing grapes this year and a second year of a lighter crop is bringing more balance to the market which is encouraging,” said Karissa Kruse, president of the Sonoma County Winegrowers and executive director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation.

This year’s crop was a little lighter due to a variety of water conservation efforts growers implemented this season to limit water use. This was true across the county and among all varieties. Though the season was void of long, lingering heatwaves, grapes in warmer regions matured slightly earlier due to it being a lighter crop and grapes from the cooler region ripened at a more normal rate.

“Everyone is relieved to get this harvest completed and the quality of this year’s vintage appears to be outstanding with intense flavor profiles,” said Mark Sanchiotti, a fourth-generation farmer from West Sonoma County and chairman of the Sonoma County Winegrape Growers. He added, “Given that we are farmers, as soon as we drop off the fruit at the winery, we immediately start focusing on the next vintage and hoping for a wet winter to end the drought.”

Despite the optimism from all corners of the county, challenges remain looking ahead. The ongoing California drought is entering its third year with the 2020/21 water year being the 9<sup>th</sup> driest year in the last 127 years of record keeping. Sonoma County is faced with extremely low water flows in the Russian River and low storage levels in local reservoirs. A long, wet winter is much needed to replenish local watersheds, reservoirs, lakes and ponds. Also, the growing shortage of workers continues to be a challenge in all industries throughout the United States including at local wineries and vineyards.

Given this, Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation conducted a survey this summer of nearly 1,000 full-time vineyard workers to better understand the challenges and needs of the local labor force and their families. The survey was significant that 965 respondents participated which

accounted for more than 15% of local vineyard workers. The survey was provided in Spanish and English and participants remained anonymous.

“We conducted the largest survey of vineyard workers ever taken in California. Due to the fires, the pandemic, and the economy, we know the past few years have been challenging for everyone. So, we conducted this survey to learn of the key issues to better understand our workforce, their challenges and needs,” said Kruse. She added, “Our focus, like that of our local grape growers, has always been to identify challenges, find solutions and foster the best communication to ensure the strongest relationships.”

Among the critical findings, more than 80% of the vineyard workers in Sonoma County are employed full-time. Over the past five years, local winegrape growers created more full-time work opportunities for vineyard workers. The full-time positions provided stability for the workers and keeps the talented workforce in the community. As a result, Sonoma County does not face many of the challenges of finding and securing seasonal employees as areas of the Central Valley and other regions of California experience.

The unique relationship between Sonoma County winegrape growers and their vineyard workers was apparent in other results in the survey.

- On average, more than half of local vineyard workers have worked for the same Sonoma County farming family or farm manager for more than 10 years.
- 20% of the respondents have worked for the same employer for more than 20 years.
- More than 40% of the respondents stated they are receiving free housing or getting housing assistance from their employer. This represented an increase from the 30% of vineyard workers receiving housing support five years ago.
- Vineyard workers rely on their family and employers as their top two resources if they need support.
- The average rate of pay for vineyard workers in Sonoma County is \$19.87 per hour which is a \$3.13 per hour increase since 2017.
- During harvest, wages for vineyard workers in Sonoma County can be as \$30 - \$40 per hour.

“Our more than 1,800 growers and their employees work together to grow, harvest and maintain Sonoma County as the most sustainable winegrowing region in the world,” stated Kruse. She added, “Together, we are sustaining agriculture in Sonoma County today and for decades to come. I was also happy to learn that over 90% of our vineyard workers would recommend working in agriculture to their family and friends. This will be critical to preserving agriculture in Sonoma County and California in the years ahead.”

With the harvest coming to an end, here are some brief reports from various AVA's in Sonoma County:

**Best news about 2021 harvest:** No fires and no smoke during harvest!

**Describe 2021 grape quality:** Exceptional flavors, intense, beautiful grapes, fruit forward and ripe

**Average crop size:** Average to slightly less than average

**Percentage of completed harvest:** 90% - 95% complete based on reports from around the county

**Targeted completion date:** Between October 15 – October 22

**Primary challenges in 2021:** Many varieties ripening around the same time

**Primary challenges for 2022:** Water! Need wet, long winter.

For more information about the Sonoma County Winegrape Growers, visit our website at: <https://sonomawinegrape.org/>

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**About Sonoma County Winegrowers:**

*Sonoma County Winegrowers (SCW), was established in 2006 as a marketing and educational organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Sonoma County as one of the world's premier grape growing regions. With more than 1,800 growers, SCW's goal is to increase awareness and recognition of the quality, sustainability and diversity of Sonoma County's grapes and wines through dynamic marketing and educational programs targeted to wine consumers and influencers around the world.*

*In 2014, Sonoma County's winegrowing community embarked on a major initiative to have all Sonoma County vineyards certified sustainable. Today, 99% of the vineyard acreage in Sonoma County has completed certification by a third-party auditor making Sonoma County the most sustainable winegrowing region in the world. In addition, in 2020, SCW became the exclusive pilot partner for the California Land Stewardship's Climate Adaptation Certification. This program is a first of its kind for agriculture. SCW's sustainability efforts have been recognized with California's highest environmental honor, the 2016 Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award (GEELA). Learn more at [www.sonomawinegrape.org](http://www.sonomawinegrape.org).*

**About the Grape Growers Foundation:**

*The Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation (SCGGF) was first established in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) organization to help fund educational workshops in Spanish for agricultural employees. Relunched in January of 2016, SCGGF is focused on improving the lives of Sonoma County's agricultural employees and their families, while ensuring Sonoma County remains a place where agricultural workers will continue to live, work, and thrive. Since its relaunch SCGGF has continuously proven it has a unique model of outreach and support, recognizing and relying on the trusted relationship that farmers have with their employees. SCGGF collaborates with various community-based organizations and agencies to identify existing resources, leverage available support, and create new programs to assist local agricultural employees and their families. This includes a focus on healthcare, affordable housing, childcare, education, recovery and resiliency, and workforce development. The Foundation is managed by the Sonoma County Winegrowers with a 18-member board of directors comprised of agricultural leaders, vineyard and winery owners, and Sonoma County community leaders.*