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SONOMA COUNTY GRAPE GROWERS' FOUNDATION SET TO LAUNCH INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR LOCAL VINEYARD EMPLOYEES

Goal is to Create Future Community and Business Leaders

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (Jan. 11th, 2022) – The Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation will soon launch an innovative program for local vineyard employees with the aim to create future leaders. The Richard and Saralee Kunde Leadership Academy will provide participants with a unique opportunity to learn about a host of topics including financial literacy, conflict resolution, community resources, wine production and more to provide critical professional development.

“The Leadership Academy is one of the most exciting efforts ever undertaken in Sonoma County,” said Karissa Kruse, executive director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation and president of Sonoma County Winegrowers. She added, “We have always enjoyed a strong relationship with our vineyard employees, and we want to provide them with the skill set to help them become leaders in our community and in our industry.”

The pioneering program will begin on Thursday, February 10th, with California Secretary of Agriculture, Karen Ross, addressing the group and providing an overview of the role of agriculture in the state’s economy. The initial session will focus on Sonoma County agriculture. The Leadership Academy will provide training in the following topics:

- Overview of Sonoma County agriculture, government, policies and more
- HR/Compliance/Regulations/Safety Overview
- Communications
- Conflict Resolution
- Financial Literacy
- Learning about wine and wine production to connect what they do in the vineyard to the final product
- Community resources overview (non-profits and programs that support Latinx population)
- Disaster Preparedness

“I applaud the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation and the Sonoma County Winegrape Growers for launching this exciting employee leadership program,” said Karen Ross, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. She added, “For farming and ranching to remain viable in California, we must create these types of new opportunities for more people to learn, connect and lead the industry in the years ahead.”

The Academy will not teach new farming skills, but, instead, focus on advancing the skills needed for vineyard employees to be promoted into leadership roles within their organization or enhance their current leadership skills and role. The Academy is named for the late Richard and Saralee Kunde, respected winegrape growers and community leaders who worked tirelessly to promote Sonoma County grapes, wine, milk and more while working to preserve farming and open space in the region.

This will be the inaugural year for the Leadership Academy. It will be an annual program with a limited number of participants each year who will be nominated by their employers and go through a selection process. The class sizes are anticipated to be 20 participants to ensure a good experience and an opportunity for individuals to freely ask questions and to build a professional network.

“Our intent is to make this the most prestigious leadership program in all of agriculture while empowering participants to pursue leadership opportunities at their work and in our community,” said Duff Bevill, chairman of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation’s board of directors. He added, “This is the next natural step for the Foundation which has long been committed to support our skilled agricultural workforce and their families who sustain farming in Sonoma County.”

The year-long leadership program will meet 8 times between February and July for a half-day class. Vineyard owners and management companies may nominate one employee for the program. There will be up to 20 participants per annual class. The accepted nominees will participate in the Learning Academy while being paid by their employers.

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