

Weather, climate factor into winemaking

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – Like all farmers, grape growers have a precarious relationship with Mother Nature.

“In 2011 we never picked the Merlot. If the birds won’t eat it, you can’t make wine,” Vaughn Jodar of Jodar Vineyards in Placerville told *Lake Tahoe News*. “2012 was beautiful. People are thrilled with the wines out of 2012.”

Vineyard managers and winemakers can work their magic each season, but ultimately the water content of the soil, the outside temperatures once the buds break, a hard freeze when the vines are no longer dormant, or prolonged heat beating down on the grapes – these are factors that are beyond the control of those in the wine business.

And those are issues on an annual basis.

Then there are the long-term consequences of climate change.



The Sierra, in the distance, provides water for many of the El Dorado County vineyards. Photos/Kathryn Reed

With how El Dorado County is situated and its various elevations throughout the region, wineries are less worried than their brethren in lower lying areas.

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and some other white varietals are definitely more temperamental.

Justin Boeger with Boeger Winery said an issue winemakers will have to pay attention to is whether certain varietals that have done well might not grow so well in that particular location in the future.

“Average temperature is very important. It’s very critical to grape growing,” Boeger said.

But he said it’s not something he is worried about at the 110 acres at his four vineyard sites.

Looking out at the 70 acres from where Boeger is sitting there is a 300-foot elevation difference between the varietals. This in itself gives his family winery flexibility.

Jodar said it’s counties that are warmer than El Dorado that are likely to have trouble in the future. While it may reach 90 degrees where he is, it’s not that temperature all day. It starts off relatively cool most mornings and the evenings cool down.

It’s the scorching temps throughout the day in other wine regions of California that are likely to be detrimental to certain varietals as increased temperatures become the new norm.



Buds are coming out on vines throughout El Dorado County.

When it comes to year in, year out farming, water can be an issue. In dry years sometimes drip irrigation is needed. Boeger gets its water from Eldorado Irrigation District.

Steve Grace at Grace Patriot Wines says water-stressing grapes can be a good thing. He tapped into EID's system three times last year.

"We could go a whole season without water and produce a good fruit," Grace said.

Being so close to the source of water also helps El Dorado County. EID gets much of its water from Desolation Wilderness, with a dam at Aloha Lake, as well as at Caples Lake on Highway 88.

And for the growers on well water, getting some snow each winter helps replenish the groundwater.

"We have everything in small blocks so the wells can handle it," Guy Herriott of Fenton Herriott Vineyards said.