

# Water rights war trickling into Calif. vineyards

By W. Blake Gray, Wine-Searcher

Two large harvests in a row are masking a scramble for vineyards in California that is only going to intensify in the next five years.

America's thirst for wines – and premium wines – continues to grow, while the prime areas in Napa and Sonoma counties are basically already planted out. Water rights in other areas of California are a huge issue, says vineyard appraiser Tony Correia.

“Water is the greatest limitation to the growth of our industry,” Correia said last week at the Wine Industry Financial Symposium in Napa. “I think we'll see state control or at least state monitoring of groundwater use in the next few years.”

Paso Robles, one of the hottest areas on California's coast both figuratively and literally, has seen its water level drop 70 feet in some areas. Local residents are complaining as their wells have run dry. And Paso is no isolated case.

“The city of Cambria just passed a law making it illegal to use district water for anything but human consumption,” Correia said. “If you water your azaleas with it four times, the city cuts off your water.” Cambria is in wine-producing San Luis Obispo County.

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