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It's official: Vintage 2018 was a bountiful one in the land of grapes, and once again, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, which continue to top the charts in popularity worldwide, led the way here in Mendocino County. The 2018 USDA Final Grape Crush Report confirms that 2018 was a huge harvest, the largest since record-setting 2013, with tonnage from the North Coast region, which includes Sonoma, Napa, Lake County and Mendocino, up an overall 26% to 588,864 tons. Statewide tonnage was up 6.6%, with most of the growth in red varieties, at 8.8%, while white varieties increased 3.9%.

This represents the biggest crop ever for Mendocino County, up 16% to a total of 81,888 tons, surpassing the previous record year, 2013, by almost 4000 tons. The value of the Mendocino crop for 2018 is reported to be \$137.5million, up almost 15% over last year's value of \$120.1 million. The crop has surpassed the \$100 million mark for four of the past five years.

Chardonnay remains the dominant varietal grown in Mendocino, accounting for 33% of the fruit harvested in 2018 with a 15% increase of tonnage to 26,768 tons. This helps compensate for the shortfall in Chardonnay grapes experienced in 2017. Cabernet Sauvignon, the second largest varietal crop in Mendocino, increased tonnage by 21%, and represented over 18% of the total Mendocino grape harvest for a total of 14,723 tons. Pinot Noir, the third largest crop, increased in tonnage by 13%, and represents almost 14% of the total crop. Zinfandel (9%), Merlot (8%), and Sauvignon Blanc (5%) are also commonly planted varietals in Mendocino County.

Prices on Cabernet Sauvignon (\$2205/ton) and Merlot (\$1353/ton) remain stable, with no price increase reported in 2018. Chardonnay prices decreased slightly (3%) to \$1293/ton. Pinot Noir continues to be the most valuable of grape varietal with an average price of \$3092/ton, and is widely grown in throughout Mendocino County. Syrah prices increased 2% to \$1580/ton and Zinfandel 1% to \$1696/ton.

Custom crush numbers increased dramatically in 2018, up 45% in Mendocino County to 14,300 tons custom crushed. This is the result of the massive crop, with grape contracts fulfilled and growers seeking a home for their excess fruit. The bountiful 2018 crop in the North Coast means that bulk wine inventories are strong, adding to a challenging marketplace. But this is also a time for creativity and innovation.

Mendocino is well situated to provide value and quality in this competitive market, as demand for our main varietals, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, remains strong. Further, Mendocino Pinot Noir is highly sought after for premium and high-end brands. Zinfandel, Syrah and Merlot are stable varieties and especially attractive for the red blends that continue to grow in popularity. As the rose all day—and all year—trend continues to gain steam, other red varieties grown here, like Carignane and Sangiovese, may prove attractive to brands looking to fill out their DTC offerings.

Mendocino County remains well-positioned to adapt and maneuver as the marketplace continues to evolve.

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