



Mendocino WineGrowers, Inc.

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Extreme Drought, Extreme Concern: Mendocino County Grapegrowers Preparing for Most Severe Water Shortage in 30 Years

January 21, 2014 -- Ukiah, Calif. -- With only 8 weeks remaining before grape growers begin the growing season, Mendocino winegrowers are increasingly concerned about the extreme drought that affects the region.

Ukiah rainfall from Oct. 1 to Jan. 15 is a paltry 2.82 inches. With weather data going back more than 100 years, this figure is without precedent. A more typical drought scenario is 8 inches of rainfall for the same time period.

"As an industry we're known for our conscientious use of water even in abundant years," says Alex MacGregor, winemaker at Saracina Vineyards in Hopland, Calif. "We are hopeful that some weather models will pan out and we'll see a gradual return to normal spring precipitation levels. That said, given extreme drought conditions, we may not have enough supply to sustain our businesses."

Water demand for the vineyard begins in mid to late March when grapevines awaken from their winter dormancy and new growth emerges from last year's buds. To protect this fragile growth from freezing during cold spring nights, many vineyard employ overhead sprinklers. Without water in the ponds, the risk of frost damage to the region's \$100 million crop is high.

The biggest "pond" in the region, Lake Mendocino, is at record low level. The majority of vineyards in Redwood Valley, Ukiah Valley, and Hopland region rely on this water supply for their vineyard. Many growers are frustrated that the US Army Corp of Engineers casually released 25,000 acre feet of water from the Lake last fall.

Water Year	2014	1991	1960	1977	1937
Rain Inches					
Oct 1 – Jan 15	2.82	3.89	5.24	5.25	5.81

The recent drought declaration from the State of California seems to place agricultural use of water last in priority. A January 17 communication from State Water Board warns vineyards that their water rights face possible suspension. The letter advises farmers to "seek alternate supplies" and revisit their "planting decisions."

"No matter what hand we are dealt this growing season, I think there will be an unprecedented level of cooperation and sharing between wineries and growers. We've got the experience and knowledge of multiple generations of winemakers and grape growers. We know how to make the best of a challenging situation."

About Mendocino WineGrowers, Inc.

Mendocino WineGrowers, Inc. (MWI) is a group of vintners and grape growers who have joined together for the express purpose of advancing the Mendocino County wine and grape growing industry. We are an elective, non-profit organization made up of members who want to promote the premium quality of our grapes and wines, and direct further interest toward our special part of the world.

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