

Editor's Letter

Dear Readers,

In 2008, the NVWL board organized just two wine education events, the Varietal Seminar and Annual Tasting. There was no Harvest or Field Seminar. So, we have taken advantage in this issue of the REPORT for an additional article.

Custom Crush has been occupying our mind for some time. It plays an increasing role in winemaking in Napa Valley and because we were interested in it, we thought you might be, too. By definition, like a bespoke suit, custom crush wine is made just for you, at a winery for a price. You, the client or customer, don't actually touch anything, but you, or your consulting winemaker, dictate how the wine is to be made, from berry to bottle, in writing. The winery then carries out your directions with its staff, monitoring every process and notifying you of any changes it deems significant in such things as rate, temperature or content of fermentation. Constant communication between the winery and a consulting winemaker is the hallmark of good winemaking at such a facility.

Napa County used to limit the number of custom crush clients. It wisely found that it was better to let a winery police itself as to the maximum number of gallons of wine it was permitted to produce, and let the number of custom crush clients vary.

Alternating Proprietorships are another way to make use of a winery. Unlike custom crush, an AP is an actual licensed and bonded user of a licensed and bonded premises. The AP just wasn't the builder of the premises. And, like custom crush clients, there may be any number of AP's for a winery, as long as production is for the amount permitted. It's all really a matter of capacity, winemaking practices, logistics, and the bottom line. AP's and custom crush clients help defray the significant expenses of building and maintaining a winery.

A bond is a payment up front to Uncle Sam of estimated excise taxes due on alcoholic beverages produced at a facility. An AP is given a credit of \$2.00 for every \$3.00 of taxes due on each case of wine it makes, up



to 100,000 gallons. Then the credit goes away. There are also direct sales and shipping benefits to being an Alternating Proprietorship. Again, it is a matter of scale. For small production, custom crush makes sense, especially today, when wineries in Napa Valley must be built on a minimum of ten acres of land.

You will notice that gallons, cases and tons are all used to measure production. A ton of grapes yields about 120 to 140 gallons (two barrels) or 20 to 25 cases of wine. We interviewed a broad spectrum of custom crush facilities with winemakers as few as four and as many as sixty, and production as small as 20,000 cases and as large as 5,000,000 cases. We hope you enjoy this particular view of contemporary winemaking in Napa Valley.

Diana H. Stockton, *Editor*