

I was watching the 9 AM Sunday Morning Show on CBS. As per usual, I was in my half-asleep mode when all of a sudden I heard the announcer say, “Birds in the vineyard.” That got my attention and I immediately sat up. I imagined that the birds were helping themselves to a few stray grapes that had fallen on the ground. Not so! The segment was approximately eight minutes long and it was reporting on a situation that growers have to deal with every year with each new crop. It is just something that does not make the news very often i.e. the grapes develop, the birds come, the workers scare the pests away and that is that. It is in the NOT taking care of the pests that would spell disaster.

We are all well aware of how large the wine industry has become. The more acreage planted, the more opportunity for birds to populate the vineyards. In full recognition of this, Standards for Bird Control have been developed from Niagara to the West coast. The Standards reflect an accumulation of experience and a level of sophistication that is quite remarkable. The best example that I could find is from the Oregon Winegrowers Association. The Standard starts out by identifying the problem birds. They are Robins, Migratory Robins, Cedar Waxwings, and Starlings. This is a double edge threat because the birds are able to fly in to the vineyard and/or take advantage of the cover and concealment offered by the vineyard and build a nest right in the vineyard. In the early Spring, the mature birds and the newly hatched birds will feed on insects and any creepy thing that they can find. It is when VERAISON occurs – the change of color of the grapeberries, signaling the onset of ripening (white grapes go from green to yellow, and red grapes go from green to red) – that the birds turn their voracious appetites toward the ripe grapes. Now the vineyard manager is forced to introduce the Bird Control Method. He may choose bird netting, probably the most effective. He may opt for Visual Devices such as balloons, scarecrows, hawk-kites, reflective tape and other devices. The devices just mentioned work best when used in conjunction with netting and/or propane cannons. Propane Cannons have their own built-in Public Relations program as they are LOUD and it is important to notify the neighbors.

The next step in Bird Control, and hopefully the last, is to introduce the use of Falconry and Owls. They would be used as an option during the later part of the growing season. These birds do not have an appetite for grapes, however they do love feasting on rodents and the birds mentioned above.

The information published on the subject of birds in relation to the vineyard problem is voluminous and fully integrated into the many Farming Sustainability Programs that exist. I see this as good thing as the Bird Control Programs do not use CHEMICALS. Publishing a fully

comprehensive article on the problem of birds as they relate to grape crops would be impossible because each state and/or region of our great nation has different problems and different programs to bring about solutions. My attempt here was to “scratch the surface.”

SOMETHING NEW: What I would like to try here is to include one or two wine terms with each article. They may or may not relate to the article, however they will be important. So . . . here we go!

ACID: A natural component of wine. It is responsible for the zesty, refreshing qualities of wines. Wines with the proper amount of acid, relative to their alcohol content, are vibrant and lively to drink. Wines with small amounts of acid are flat. Yuck! There are multiple acids in wine, the three most important are Tartaric, Malic, and Citric. Chefs are constantly searching for that one great wine that they can cook with. Once found, it will become their favorite.

AGING: The process of intentionally holding a wine for a period of time so that the components in it can integrate and the wine can become softer and maybe more complex. This is usually a trial and error process under the supervision of the Winemaker.

VERAISON: See article above!

WINESPEAK

I must have been asleep when the bird situation came up. I was guilty of never having given it any consideration. I realize that our feathered friends are never discussed at a presentation or wine tasting and now I understand why. Another surprise was the amount of information available in print and on the internet. The wine drinking public is very well informed on the subject. As for the vocabulary words, I plead guilty. I should have started it years ago.