



Chapter 7

WINE QUALITY

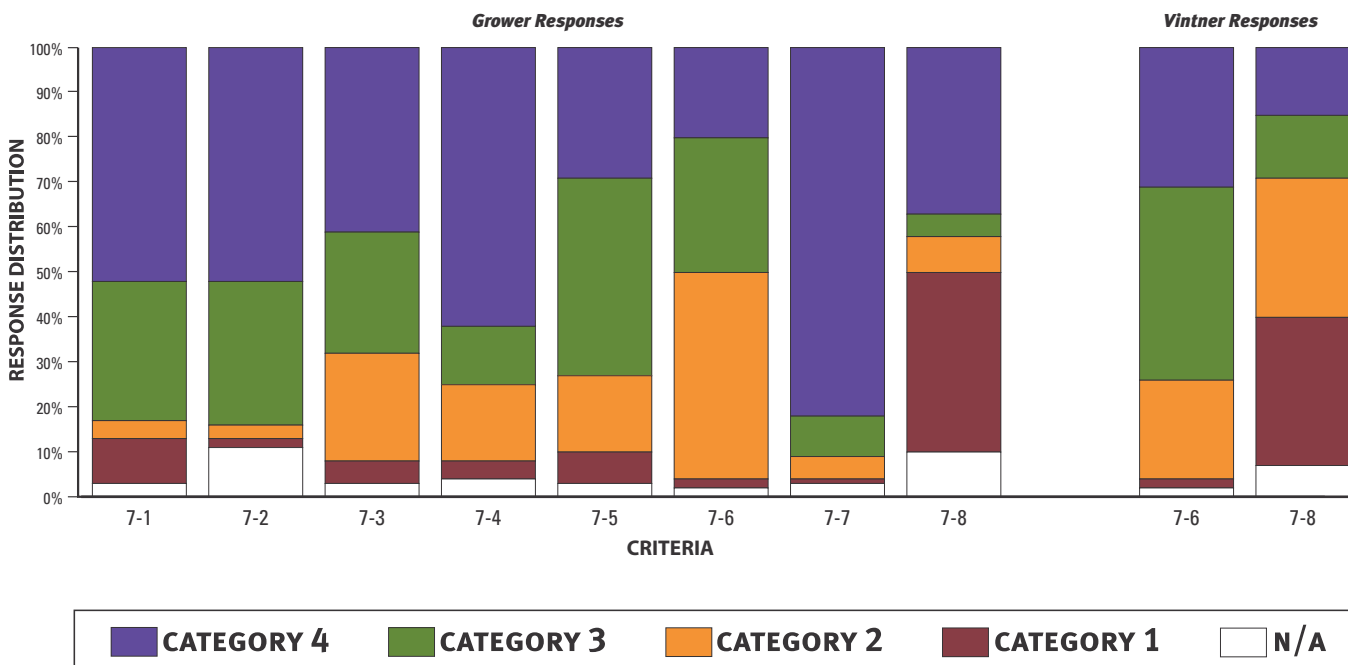
Background

Overall quality is a subjective measure that is affected by both experience and preference. However, some aspects of quality can be measured objectively by parameters such as color, flavor, malic acid and pH.

Many growers have an on-going dialogue with the winery buying their fruit regarding the specific quality aspects the winemaker is expecting from the harvest. This conversation is enhanced by the knowledge and information that the grower can provide to the winemaker regarding the specific practices used in the vineyard on an annual basis. Information on the specific growing practices will also fulfill the increasing need for food safety requirements so that the winemaker can accurately know all of the relevant processes that went into producing the fruit from any vineyard.

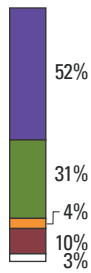
When delivering winegrapes to the winery, detailed information on the winegrowing process can enhance fruit quality. As the new generation of wine consumers, known as “the millennium group,” begins selecting from the vast assortment of wines available on the global market, research has shown that one of their selection criteria is the availability of information on the farming practices on how the fruit was grown to determine if it matches their values. These criteria can include organic certification as well as how sustainable practices were used throughout the winegrowing and winemaking processes.

WINE QUALITY BENCHMARK DATA

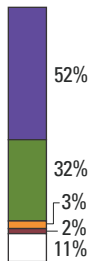


Benchmark Data

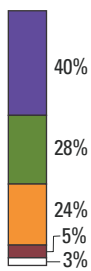
Grower Response



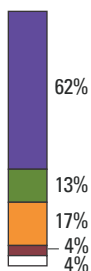
7-1. FIELD FRUIT MATURITY Maturity of the fruit before harvest is a key element in ensuring the best fruit possible for the winemaker. But maturity is more than sugar levels - it is berries that are ripe and fully developed in all of their flavor aspects. 52% of the growers consider their fruit mature when juice Brix is at the desired point for harvest, canes are 80% woody, seeds are all brown and shoot growth has stopped. 31% use the same criteria but also have canes that are 50%-80% woody. Another 4% harvest when the canes are less than 50% woody and shoots are still growing. 10% harvest based only on the desired level of Brix and 3% replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.



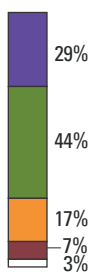
7-2. TASTING THE GRAPES Beyond collecting information visually, growers can acquire useful information by field tasting fruit with the winery representative. 84% of growers taste the fruit with a winery representative with 52% tasting frequently, 32% tasting several times before harvest and 3% tasting as the fruit is being picked. About 2% have not seen a winery representative since they signed the contract and about 11% replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.



7-3. JUICE CHEMISTRY Juice chemistry provides invaluable information to the grower and the winemaker. For the growers, science can determine the specific fruit qualities that are beneficial for the winemaker and negative qualities that should be eliminated. 68% of growers measure and record juice chemistry annually and 40% also include malic acid, tartaric acid, potassium and ammonia in the analysis. 24% of the growers measure and record Brix, while 5% do not keep any record of juice chemistry. 3% replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.

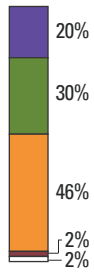


7-4. TASTING THE WINE Tasting fruit in the field is one way to gain flavor information but the proof is in the bottle at the end of the process. 62% of growers sit down with the wine maker and taste the wine made from their fruit and compare that to other wines made from the same region. 13% have tasted regional wines with the winemaker that contained blends of the grower's fruit. 17% receive informal feedback from the winemaker, with 4% receiving no feedback at all. 4% replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.



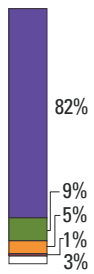
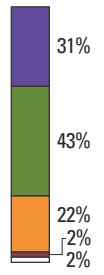
7-5. KNOWLEDGE OF WINE QUALITY Understanding how the winemaker and the wine-drinking consumer define quality requires wine quality knowledge on behalf of the grower. 73% of the growers have taken classes, attended national and international tastings and understand how to trace the components of wine quality back to their vineyard. 29% have also toured other regions in the state and internationally. 17% plan to attend domestic and international tastings and 7% either taste local wine or none at all. 3% replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.

Grower Response

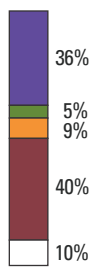


7-6. KNOWLEDGE OF WINE INDUSTRY Wine quality knowledge includes an understanding of the wine industry. 50% of the growers and 74% of the vintners are aware of trends and prices in bulk and case wine, and knowledgeable about winegrowing and production techniques. 20% of growers and 31% of vintners are also aware of international trends and prices in bulk and case wine as well. 46% of growers and 22% of the vintners say they are aware of trends and prices in bulk and case wine in California and other parts of the world. 2% of growers and vintners report no awareness and 2% of growers and vintners replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.

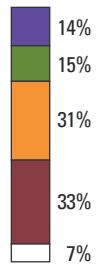
Vintner Response



7-7. VITICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT Input from the winemaker, winery representative and others can help growers improve their vineyard operations. 82% of growers use the assistance of the winemaker and/or winery representative to determine which practices contribute to wine quality. 9% try to figure it out on their own, while 5% take suggestions from the winery into account. 1% let others determine what they do and 3% replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.



7-8. PLANNING, MONITORING, GOALS AND RESULTS Successful wineries and profitable wine labels are the result of consistencies in growing the fruit and making good wine year after year. This consistency is especially important in light of the increasing national security demands on food traceability and chain-of-custody. Growers and vintners now need to plan for food safety and security. 36% of growers and 14% of vintners have developed a food security plan, implemented it for more than one year, monitored and reviewed it and are using the results to improve the plan. 5% of growers and 15% of vintners have developed a plan and are just beginning to implement it. 9% of growers and 31% of vintners are investigating such a plan, and 40% of growers and 33% of vintners have no plans in place to investigate developing such a plan. 10% of growers and 7% of vintners replied N/A, not applicable or information not available.



Best Practices

Statewide Strengths: More than 70% of growers reported using best practices for evaluating field fruit maturity, tasting grapes with winery personnel, conducting appropriate juice chemical analysis, tasting wine made from their grapes, possessing a high-level of knowledge about wine quality, and determining which viticultural practices contribute to wine quality. More than 70% of vintners reported best practices for knowledge of wine quality.

“The main driver for our Reduced Deficit Irrigation (RDI) program is wine quality,” says Don Ackerman, viticulturist for Beringer Blass Wine Estates’ 5000 acres on the Central Coast. When the winery began the program in the late 1980’s, the transition to RDI was mostly a change of mindset since all the winery’s vineyards had drip irrigation lines. In the past, water-

ing was done early in the season to jump start vine growth, then tapered off after the berries gained color to promote sugar accumulation.

Water conservation is also important because most of the winery’s irrigation water comes from wells. RDI is a natural fit with coastal winegrowing - frugal because of the limited water supply. Ackerman says the winery can save an average of 25% in water and energy costs with RDI, depending upon the weather.

“We’re really pleased with the results and quality of wines,” says Ackerman. “We share our information with growers. Those who are interested in the highest quality are willing to give up a small percentage of yield for that quality. It’s been worth the quality pay-off for both of us.”

Targets for Continual Improvement

Statewide Opportunities for Improvements: There is an opportunity for more than 50% of the growers to improve their knowledge of the wine industry (criteria 7-6).

The California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance has set a desired goal of demonstrating improvement in the scores indicated below. By harvest 2009, CSWA will strive to move the average scores to the positions marked in green. When these goals are attained, practices will have improved from the initial benchmark averages by 20%. To reach these goals, CSWA needs partners. If you are interested in improving wine quality practices, please email info@sustainablewinegrowing.org.

