The 2018 Unified Wine & Grape Symposium

Every facet of the wine industry was examined, discussed and debated in January at the 24th Unified Wine & Grape Symposium. The largest wine show of its kind in the Western Hemisphere, the symposium drew industry professionals from all over the world.

Nearly 14,000 people, including exhibitors from nearly 30 countries, came to Sacramento to hear about the impact of recent fires, trends, technology, research and issues shaping their business decisions. The symposium is presented annually by the American Society for Enology and Viticulture and the California Association of Winegrape Growers.

Queen of Red Grapes

More than one third – or 37.4 percent – of the grape nursery stock in California last year was Cabernet Sauvignon, according to the Allied Grape Growers report, which was presented at the annual Unified Wine & Grape Symposium in Sacramento in January. In 2016, Cabernet Sauvignon accounted for 30.5 percent of total grape varietal plantings.

The amount of Cabernet Sauvignon as a percentage of varietals planted has been steadily and quickly on the rise for a decade. More Cabernet Sauvignon is being planted all over California, not just in the Napa Valley. It has grown in popularity in other regions including the Central Valley.

Wine is Going Green

Three wineries and one vineyard that went green in recent years went to the State Capitol, where lawmakers praised their examples of sustainability for the California wine industry. In a joint hearing of the Senate and Assembly Select Committees on Wine, the four companies were lauded with this year's Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Awards for their work.

More than 75 percent of California wine is made in certified sustainable wineries, while a third of wine grape acreage is certified sustainable.
The Effects of an Early Spring and Late Winter

Frost can be devastating to wine grapes. In April, 2017, France's wine region was hit with the worst frost since 1991. About 30% to 50% of French vines were impacted. California's Napa & Sonoma wine country is typically at risk of frost until June. This year, that risk is heightened because of a very mild winter that led to an early bud break in some areas. This was followed by a colder March and April.

Cabernet Sauvignon grape buds in Napa, like many varietals, broke early this year in February. To avoid frost, with April nighttime temperatures approaching freezing, Napa Valley growers are turning on their wind machines in these early weeks of the growing season.

Wild Weather Threatens Wine

Whatever you think about climate change, and regardless of what you think causes it, one thing is sure: Wild weather is threatening the state of world wine as we know it.

“Extreme weather across many wine regions in 2017 may be more than a blip,” said Chris Mercer, a writer for the British wine magazine Decanter. “Weather has become more volatile and more extreme in the past 36 years,” Mercer wrote, quoting a recent report from the European Academies’ Science Advisory Council.

International Trade Wars & Wine

California commodities will be particularly hard-hit by the roughly $500 million in Chinese tariffs imposed on American agricultural goods in response to President Trump's duties on imported steel and aluminum. New tariffs of 15 percent to 25 percent were attached to goods including wine.

This is already having an effect on California's wine industry. For example, for LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards in the Lodi area, the 15 percent additional tariff on wine has already resulted in one order being canceled and another being put on hold while price negotiations occur.

Southern California’s Ambitious New Wine Region

One of California's most ambitious vineyard plays is afoot in the hills west of Temecula. The region, known as De Luz, rises starkly above the flatter Temecula Valley, where most of the grapevines are grown in this area northeast of San Diego. When it's hot and sunny on the valley floor, the hills can be awash in fog and wind, often 15 degrees cooler.