



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

California Winegrape Community Mourns the Passing of Industry Leader John Ledbetter

Former CAWG Chair, Sustainability Pioneer, and Respected Industry Leader Remembered for a Lifetime of Service

SACRAMENTO, CALIF – June 26, 2026 – The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) mourns the loss of former CAWG Chair John Ledbetter, who passed away on June 23. John was a respected leader, visionary grower, and tireless advocate whose influence helped shape California's winegrape industry for decades.

Born and raised in Delano, California, John married his high school sweetheart, Edyth, and together they raised two children, Kimberly and Craig. John served in the U.S. Navy as a Sonar Technician First Class from 1967 to 1973. Following his military service, he earned a degree in Agricultural Business and Agricultural Economics from California State University, Fresno. After beginning his career with the Farm Credit System, John returned to the family farming operation in 1978, where he devoted the rest of his career to advancing California's winegrape industry.

Together with his brother, Jim, John helped transform the family business from a small regional farming operation into one of California's leading winegrape growing and vineyard management companies. Throughout his career, he championed innovation and sustainability, working closely with the Lodi Winegrape Commission to advance integrated pest management practices and playing a pivotal role in developing the groundbreaking Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing Program.

John's leadership extended well beyond his own vineyards. He served as Chair of the CAWG Board of Directors from 1987 to 1989 and held numerous leadership positions throughout the industry, including President of the Lodi District Grape Growers Association, Chairman of the Lodi Winegrape Commission, Vice Chair of Winegrape Growers of America, Board Member of the Wine Market Council, and Supreme Knight of the Knights of the Vine. He was also a graduate of California Agricultural Leadership Program Class 12.

"John Ledbetter was a cornerstone of this association and a tireless champion for California winegrape growers," said CAWG President Natalie Collins. "He showed up, did the work, and never stopped believing this industry could be stronger for everyone in it. His family has held a seat at the CAWG table since our earliest days — from John's chairmanship, to Kim's, to Craig's service on our board today. That kind of legacy doesn't happen by accident. It happens when a family genuinely believes in the mission. We are heartbroken at his passing and grateful for everything the Ledbetter family has given to the California winegrape industry."

Philanthropy was central to John's life. Through his generosity and leadership, countless organizations and individuals benefited from his commitment to giving back. His legacy will continue through the many programs, organizations, and people whose lives he touched.

Additional details about John's life and accomplishments, along with information about making a memorial donation in his honor, can be found in his obituary. A memorial service will be held on Thursday, July 2, at St. John's Episcopal Church (1055 S. Lower Sacramento Road, Lodi), followed by a reception at Appellation Lodi (2505 W. Turner Road, Lodi).

CAWG extends its heartfelt condolences to Edyth, Kimberly, Craig, and the entire Ledbetter family. John's leadership, generosity, and unwavering commitment to California agriculture will be remembered for generations to come.

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About the California Association of Winegrape Growers: CAWG is a statewide nonprofit trade association advocating for California's winegrape growers to ensure the sustainability of the winegrape industry. CAWG promotes the industry's long-term success by advancing the adoption of sound public policies and fostering awareness and understanding of winegrape growers' contributions to the economy, environment, and California communities. Learn more at cawg.org.