



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAWG Announces 2027 Awards of Excellence Recipients

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines named Grower of the Year; Jeff Bitter named Leader of the Year

SACRAMENTO, September 21, 2026 – The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) has selected J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines as its 2027 Grower of the Year and Jeff Bitter, President of Allied Grape Growers, as its 2027 Leader of the Year.

“It is an honor to recognize J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines and Jeff Bitter for their outstanding contributions to California’s winegrape industry,” said CAWG President Natalie Collins. “Both have a long history of investment in California winegrape growing and engagement across the broader industry. They lead by example, bring tremendous experience to the table, and have demonstrated a deep commitment to the long-term strength of our industry.”

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines will receive CAWG’s Grower of the Year Award, recognizing the company’s leadership in winegrowing, sustainability and innovation. Founded by Jerry Lohr, J. Lohr has grown into a multigenerational, family-owned and operated winegrowing business, with vineyards in Paso Robles, Arroyo Seco in Monterey County, and St. Helena in Napa Valley. Today, Jerry’s children, Steve, Cynthia, and Lawrence, are actively involved in the ownership and daily operations of the vineyards and winery.

“The Lohr family are thoughtful leaders who continually put California first,” Collins said. “They have spent decades investing not only in their own vineyards and wines, but in the future of California agriculture. Their approach to sustainability, innovation and industry involvement reflects the kind of leadership that has made a lasting impact on California winegrowing.”

Jeff Bitter will receive CAWG’s Leader of the Year Award, recognizing his leadership and advocacy on behalf of California winegrape growers. A grower himself and president of Allied Grape Growers, Bitter is one of the industry’s most recognizable voices and a longtime partner to CAWG. He previously served on CAWG’s board of directors and has joined the association in advocacy efforts in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. He also encourages his team at Allied to be actively engaged in the issues affecting growers.

“Jeff is someone whose opinion I trust and respect, particularly when our industry is facing difficult issues,” Collins said. “He is thoughtful, candid and always willing to engage, and his commitment to growers goes far beyond his role at Allied. He genuinely cares about the future of this industry and is willing to put in the time and work to make it stronger.”

CAWG will honor both recipients at its Awards of Excellence Reception on Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2027, at 6 p.m. during the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium. The reception will immediately follow the welcome reception at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Sacramento and is open to all attendees. [Sponsorship opportunities](#) are available. Please contact [Mindy DeRohan](#) for more information.

CAWG GROWER OF THE YEAR

For more than 250 years, generations of the Lohr family have been involved in agriculture around the world. Today, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines farms more than 1,400 acres of estate vineyards in Monterey County with a focus on Chardonnay, Riesling, Valdiguié, and Pinot Noir. In Paso Robles, the family farms more than 2,700 acres, producing Cabernet Sauvignon, Bordeaux, and Rhône varieties. The family also farms more than 30 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot at Carol’s Vineyard in Napa Valley, named after Jerry’s late wife.

After seven decades of farming, Jerry Lohr knows that successful winegrowing starts with caring for the land. That understanding has shaped J. Lohr's approach to sustainability, from water management and renewable energy to vineyard technology and pest management.

The Lohrs' involvement in the industry also goes beyond their own vineyards and winery. Over the years, members of the family have served in leadership roles with organizations throughout the wine and grape industry, sharing their experience and helping address issues important to California agriculture and winegrowing.

"The Grower of the Year Award is recognition that we have set a tone of excellence for our vineyard operations that equates exceptional quality with growing and producing our own wines," said J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines Founder & CFO Jerry Lohr. "The example we believe we set is not just for the benefit of our operations but for the advancement of the entire winegrape growing industry."

CAWG LEADER OF THE YEAR

Jeff Bitter's connection to California agriculture and the winegrape industry runs four generations deep. A lifelong California resident and fourth-generation grape grower, Jeff actively farms winegrapes in Madera County.

That firsthand experience as a grower has shaped Jeff's nearly 30 years with Allied Grape Growers (AGG), where he now serves as President. AGG is a statewide grape growers cooperative marketing association representing approximately 400 members and marketing between \$70-100 million worth of grapes annually. Jeff's industry service also includes serving as Treasurer of the Pierce's Disease and Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter Board, Chairman of the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, and a member of the Market Enforcement Advisory Board and West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force.

For more than a decade, Jeff has shared the grower perspective through his annual "State of the Industry" report at the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium. Drawing on his experience as a grower and industry leader, he provides a candid look at supply, market conditions, and the forces shaping California winegrape production. For Jeff, leadership is less about holding a title and more about doing the work. His years of farming, industry service, and experience representing growers have made that approach a defining part of his leadership.

"It's an honor to be named Leader of the Year by an organization I love encouraging and supporting. Collaboration and collective voice are absolutely essential for success of the winegrape grower community, and being named as a leader in that effort is an honor," said Jeff Bitter.

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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.