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GROWERS

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CAWG Announces 2026 Awards of Excellence Recipients

Jackson Family Wines named Grower of the Year; Stuart Spencer named Leader of the Year

SACRAMENTO, September 11, 2025 – The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) is excited to announce the selection of Jackson Family Wines of Sonoma County as its 2026 Grower of the Year, and Stuart Spencer, Executive Director of the Lodi Winegrape Commission, as its 2026 Leader of the Year.

"It is an honor to recognize the leadership of the Jackson Family and Stuart Spencer, whose contributions and dedication have strengthened California's winegrape industry while driving innovation and advocating for meaningful policy change," said Natalie Collins, CAWG President.

"The Jackson family exemplifies what it means to be stewards of the land and leaders in our industry," Collins continued. "Their multigenerational commitment to sustainable farming, climate leadership, and community investment has set a powerful example statewide. By partnering on research, championing innovation, prioritizing California's vineyard economy, and engaging in policy advocacy, they've elevated not only their own vineyards but the resilience of the entire growing community."

"Over the past year, Stuart has stepped forward and led from the front - speaking hard truths, backing them with research, and drawing national attention to issues that matter most to California winegrowers. Through his leadership at the Lodi Winegrape Commission and his experience as both a grower and winemaker, he has elevated the Lodi brand, boosted regional tourism, championed sustainability, and empowered growers across the state. His continued leadership strengthens vineyards, communities, and the long-term future of California's wine industry."

CAWG GROWER OF THE YEAR

The Grower of the Year Award, the highest honor bestowed by CAWG, recognizes individuals, families, or companies for exceptional excellence in viticulture, successful management, innovation, and leadership within the industry.

For more than 40 years, Jackson Family Wines has set a standard of excellence in California winegrowing. What began as Jess Jackson's vision has grown into a multigenerational legacy rooted in land, community, and a deep respect for California's agricultural heritage.

The family's commitment to sustainability is central to their philosophy. All of their estate vineyards are certified sustainable, with 100% of their Napa Valley holdings also certified organic. Their vineyard teams use precision tools, ranging from soil moisture sensors and weather stations to drones and infrared imaging, to guide farming decisions, protect vineyard health, and steward natural resources. For the Jackson family, sustainability is not an initiative, but a way of life.

Their leadership extends beyond their own vineyards. By hosting field days, opening vineyards for research, and engaging with policymakers, they have helped connect growers, regulators, and communities in

advancing solutions that protect the environment and ensure the long-term success of California agriculture.

“Being named CAWG’s Grower of the Year is one of the most humbling honors our family could receive. Because this recognition comes from our peers—the growers who understand the passion and dedication required to tend vineyards season after season—it is especially meaningful,” shares the Jackson family. “This award doesn’t just celebrate our family’s work; it honors every employee over the years who has put their heart and soul into growing and producing wines that help shape California’s strong reputation.”

CAWG LEADER OF THE YEAR

The Leader of the Year Award recognizes an individual whose record of exceptional leadership has benefited California's wine industry.

Stuart Spencer, Executive Director of the Lodi Winegrape Commission, is one of the region’s most passionate ambassadors, sharing Lodi’s story far beyond California and championing growers across the state. In addition to his leadership role at the Commission, Stuart is also both a winegrape grower and winemaker at his family’s St. Amant Winery. Through this dual perspective and his strategic leadership, Stuart has shaped many of Lodi’s most transformative initiatives. Today, he represents more than 750 growers farming 85,000 vineyard acres and supports over 80 wineries.

Beyond Lodi, Stuart has been a tireless advocate for California winegrape growers. He has not shied away from confronting difficult issues, bringing national attention to policies and practices that threaten the winegrape industry. From exposing the impact of foreign bulk wine imports and duty drawback abuse to highlighting trade imbalances created by foreign subsidies, Stuart has consistently given voice to small and mid-sized growers whose livelihoods depend on fair and stable markets.

“It’s a true honor to be recognized by the California Association of Winegrape Growers,” Spencer said. “I care deeply about California growers and our winegrape industry, and I believe this is a critical time for all of us to stand up and make our voices heard. I’m proud to do my part in advocating for growers across the state.”

RECEPTION

To honor and celebrate the awardees, CAWG will be hosting an Awards of Excellence Reception on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. The reception will be held during the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium, immediately following the welcome reception at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Sacramento. All are invited to attend and help us celebrate the contributions of both Jackson Family Wines and Stuart Spencer.

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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.
