



CALIFORNIA  
ASSOCIATION  
of WINEGRAPE  
GROWERS

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## **CAWG Announces 2024 Awards of Excellence Recipients**

SACRAMENTO, September 5, 2023 – The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) is thrilled to announce the selection of Sangiacomo Family Vineyards of Sonoma County as its 2024 Grower of the Year, and California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Secretary, Karen Ross as its 2024 Leader of the Year.

"We applaud the remarkable leadership of the Sangiacomo Family and Secretary Karen Ross, who have both catalyzed positive change and growth within the winegrape industry," said CAWG President Natalie Collins.

"With a farming legacy that spans generations, the Sangiacomo family is recognized industry-wide for their pioneering spirit, commitment to sustainable practices, innovation, and community engagement," said Collins. "It's an honor to recognize their contributions and celebrate their well-deserved title as Grower of the Year."

"Secretary Ross's visionary approach and collaborative nature, both during her tenure as President of CAWG and demonstrated through her leadership as Secretary of CDFA, have paved the way for the continued success of California's winegrape industry. As we approach the celebration of CAWG's 50th anniversary in 2024, honoring Secretary Ross as our Leader of the Year holds a special significance," said Collins.

### **2024 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.

The Sangiacomo family has a rich history in the Sonoma Valley that spans more than five decades. With an agricultural heritage dating back to their ancestors in Genoa, Italy, multiple generations of the Sangiacomo family have worked the land for almost a century in Sonoma County. In 1969, the Sangiacomo family planted their first wine grapes, playing a crucial role in re-establishing the Sonoma Valley as a renowned winegrowing region.

As third-generation farmers, Steve, Mike, and Mia have successfully taken over the family grape growing business from their father Angelo, Aunt Lorraine, and Uncles Buck and Bob. Their goal is to pass on their love for farming and their deep passion for the wine industry to the fourth generation of Sangiacomos, their combined seven children. The Sangiacomo Family currently tends to more than 1,600 acres of vineyards in Sonoma County, with their core values revolving around agriculture, viticulture, and family.

The Sangiacomo family not only holds a significant presence in Sonoma County, but also stand as trailblazers in terms of industry leadership. The family is highly engaged in their local community, and at the state level as an active CAWG member.

“It’s a true honor to be recognized as Grower of the Year. With prestigious recognitions like this, we can’t help but think fondly of the generation before us who began our grape growing story in Sonoma 54 years ago,” shares Mike, Steve, and Mia. “Our dad, uncles, and aunt’s spirit and dedication to growing world-class wine grapes and creating a lasting family business are illuminated in this honor. We are proud to be grape growers along with so many other farmers in California as we all fight to preserve agriculture in our nation.”

#### **2024 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.

California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross is no stranger to the California winegrape industry. A true advocate for agriculture, Secretary Ross served as the first woman President of CAWG for 13 years before serving as chief of staff for US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. In 2011, Secretary Ross was appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown as California’s Secretary of Agriculture. Secretary Ross’ leadership in agricultural matters at the state, national, and international levels is unmatched.

Her tenure as the California Secretary of Agriculture has been marked by significant progress in sustainability, food security, and agricultural innovation. Secretary Ross’ inclusive and collaborative approach to policymaking has made her a friend of stakeholders across the agricultural spectrum. Under her leadership, California's agriculture industry has thrived while simultaneously addressing environmental concerns and ensuring the well-being of farmers throughout the state.

“My first reaction was to be embarrassed because I don’t feel worthy of this award, knowing some of the past recipients include past chairs, legends, and icons in the industry, and I thought holy cow – I’ve always gotten to do what I loved and I always told people that was the best job that I have ever had,” commented Secretary Ross. “But, receiving this award is such an honor and I am truly humbled that the people I got to work for, and I got to serve, all these years later still think of me as worthy of this honor.”

#### **RECEPTION**

To honor both, CAWG will be hosting an Awards of Excellence Reception on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, 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 the Sangiacomo Family and Secretary Karen Ross.

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