



California Association of
**Winegrape
Growers**

2025 Annual Report



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Standing Strong for California Winegrape Growers

Over the past year, growers confronted hard realities - market volatility, canceled contracts, rising costs, and climate pressure. We see the load you're carrying, and you're not carrying it alone.

This Year in Review shows how CAWG stood with growers, pushing back against harmful policy, advancing grower-built solutions, and elevating your priorities in Sacramento, Washington, D.C., and across the industry. As we move into 2026, our focus remains clear: fair markets, workable rules, risk tools that pay when it counts, and a sustainability framework that protects economic viability in the vineyard.

We've worked to keep growers at the center, not as an afterthought, but as the foundation of California's wine industry. From trade and labeling to sustainability and labor, CAWG continues to remind policymakers and partners that the success of California wine begins in the vineyard.

As we move forward from CAWG's 50th anniversary, we honor the generations who built this organization and the leaders shaping what comes next. Your resilience, innovation, and integrity are why CAWG stands strong, even in the toughest seasons.

This review captures a glimpse of the work happening every day on your behalf, coalition-building, policy advocacy, data-driven arguments, and constant vigilance to stop bad ideas before they become bad law. None of it is possible without our 27 grower board members, our dedicated staff and advocacy team, and you - our members - who continue to show up, speak up, and lead with purpose.

Together, we'll keep pressing for a fair, sound, and thriving future for California's winegrape growers. The path forward won't be easy, but our direction is steady, our voice is unified, and our resolve is strong. CAWG will continue to stand for you, and with you, in every hearing, every meeting, and every season, until growers have the fair markets, workable rules, and economic certainty they need to succeed.

Sincerely,



Natalie Collins
President



CAWG STAFF

Natalie Collins, President
Michael Mueller, Director of Government Relations
Mindy DeRohan, Manager of Membership & Communications
Jenny Devine, Contract Events Manager
Carolee Williams, Contract Business Manager

CAWG DIRECTORS

Duff Bevell, Bevell Vineyard Management
Jeff Bitter, Madera
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Gregg Hibbits, Grapevine Capital Partners
Ben Kolber, KG Vineyard Management
Aaron Lange, LangeTwins, Inc.
Ron Lanza, Lanza Vineyards
Bob Lauchland, Robert Lauchland Vineyards
Craig Ledbetter, VINO Farms
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Michael Manna, Manna Ranch
Joel Maring, J Maring Farms
Eric Marthedal, Marthedal Farms
Cameron Mauritson, Mauritson Farms, Inc.
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Dave Michul, Beckstoffer Vineyards



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Jason Smith, Valley Farm Management
Karin Warnelius-Miller, Garden Creek Ranch Vineyards Winery
Johnnie White, Pina Vineyard Management
Jeff Wiens, Wiens Family Cellars
Ryan Winters, Winters Farming, Inc.

Directors at Large

Amy Blagg, Lodi District Grape Growers Association
Joel Peterson, Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance

Advancing policies and securing legislative wins that protect and strengthen California's winegrape industry.

Federal Legislative Review

This year, CAWG has been relentless in advancing federal priorities to protect and strengthen the California winegrape industry. The theme has been simple but urgent: level the playing field. CAWG continues to ensure that growers have a strong and respected voice in Washington, D.C.

Duty Drawback Reform

One of the most abusive loopholes in U.S. trade and tax policy, known as "double duty drawback," remains a top target of CAWG's advocacy.

Duty drawback was meant to avoid double taxation, but changes in 1984 and a 2008 Customs Border Patrol (CBP) interpretation created a loophole: companies import foreign bulk wine, bottle/blend here, export a different product, and reclaim 99% of duties and fees, including excise tax that was never meant to be refundable.

Why it Matters

This loophole distorts the marketplace, rewarding large companies that can leverage imports/exports while leaving independent wineries and growers at a severe disadvantage. Even CBP has said the practice was never authorized and has resulted in "significant abuse."

This Year's Action

- **The First Shot:** The House's "One Big Beautiful Tax Bill" initially included repeal for tobacco. Intense lobbying in the Senate blocked it, but it marked the first real legislative attempt to close the loophole.
- **Wine Takes the Lead:** In June, Congressman Josh Harder (CA) introduced an amendment to the Homeland Security Appropriations Bill to repeal double duty drawback for wine. Though narrowly crafted and targeted only at excise tax refunds, it faced coordinated opposition from multinational spirits and wine importers and was withdrawn.

CAWG continues to frame this for what it is - a government-funded subsidy for importers at the expense of American growers, workers, and taxpayers. CAWG's message remains clear: this loophole must be ended.

Petition to Amend the American Appellation

CAWG has revived a long-standing effort to strengthen truth in labeling. CAWG is preparing to re-petition the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) to amend the American Appellation, requiring wines labeled "American" to be made from 100% U.S.-grown fruit. Current law allows up to 25% foreign content, which dilutes consumer trust and undercuts growers. Advancing this petition will help reassert the integrity of our nation's winegrape growers.



Fighting Foreign Bulk Wine Imports

CAWG continues to sound the alarm on the growing volume of foreign bulk wine entering the U.S. This year, we:

- Held direct meetings with Administration officials and Members of Congress to highlight how the impacts of bulk wine imports on California growers.
- Submitted multiple comment letters to the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) urging fair and reciprocal tariff policies.
- Commissioned research to better understand the impacts of bulk imports on California growers.

Wildfire Smoke Research & Relief

Our advocacy for dedicated funding has kept wildfire smoke exposure on the federal agenda. CAWG has worked to secure:

- Increased federal investment in smoke research to develop reliable testing, mitigation, and crop insurance solutions.
- Disaster relief resources for growers impacted by market disruptions caused by smoke events.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) 2025–2030

The DGA, updated every five years, influence federal policy and how consumers view alcohol. This cycle has raised concerns about bias and limited transparency. CAWG has urged Congress and the Administration to uphold a rigorous, science-driven process with strong conflict-of-interest safeguards and full disclosure of evidence.

Looking Ahead

CAWG will continue pressing for fair trade, transparent labeling, robust research funding, and science-based federal nutrition policy. Each step, from duty drawback reform to appellation integrity, reinforces our broader mission: to level the playing field for California winegrape growers and ensure the long-term strength of California's wine community.

Wildfire Smoke Communications

In 2025, the West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force (WCSETF) began publishing Spotlight Newsletters and Research Bulletins. The Spotlight Newsletter features research updates, news from California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, timely articles, and upcoming events. The Research Bulletin summarizes the 27-page Smoke Exposure Research Roadmap developed by USDA-ARS researcher Arran Rumbaugh. The Bulletins break out the five critical research priorities identified by researchers and industry. Subscribe to future WCSETF news at wcsetf.org.

CAWG@WORK

Delivering resources, services, and tools to help growers succeed in a changing environment.

CAWG Introduces Refreshed Logo and New Website

After a thoughtful assessment of CAWG's brand identity, CAWG is excited to unveil a refreshed logo. Rather than a complete redesign, the decision was made to modernize our existing logo, retaining the familiar elements growers and industry partners recognize, while updating the look to be more current, versatile, and reflective of today's industry.



The refreshed logo maintains the iconic grape leaf and cluster, symbolizing CAWG's deep roots in California's winegrape industry, but introduces a cleaner design and contemporary typography for a more modern and accessible feel. This update bridges CAWG's proud 50-year history with its forward-looking vision, ensuring the brand continues to represent winegrape growers with strength, clarity, and relevance for decades to come.

In addition to the refreshed logo, CAWG also launched a redesigned website in the fall of 2025. The new site serves as a central hub for resources, tools, and timely updates, making it easier for members to access the information they need and for CAWG to showcase its advocacy, educational programs, and industry leadership.

The redesigned website also introduces a member dashboard and digital membership directory, providing an enhanced, user-friendly experience for members. These new tools offer easier access to exclusive resources, streamline member engagement, and make it more convenient than ever to connect with fellow CAWG members and industry partners.

Together, the refreshed logo and new website mark an exciting step forward in how CAWG represents and serves California winegrape growers.

Honoring Excellence



CAWG recognized Santa Barbara County's the Miller Family – The Thornhill Companies as its 2025 Grower of the Year and Randy Heinzen, President of Vineyard Professional Services as its 2025 Leader of the Year.

The contributions of the Miller Family and Randy Heinzen have helped to elevate the winegrape industry and it was a privilege to celebrate their dedication, leadership and excellence.

CAWG hosted an Awards of Excellence Reception to honor both during the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium.

California Vineyard Mapping



This year, CAWG launched a statewide Vineyard Mapping Project in partnership with regional winegrower associations to provide the most accurate picture yet of vineyard acreage. In its first year, the project established a comprehensive baseline of standing acreage across California, as well as removed acreage from Oct 2024 - Aug 2025.

Going forward, it will allow members to track vineyard trends over time, by American Viticultural Area (AVA), crush district, or county. This project gives the industry a credible dataset to support regional benchmarking, market planning, and inform policy decisions.

It All Happens @Unified



The 2025 Unified Wine and Grape Symposium drew nearly 10,000 growers, vintners, researchers, and suppliers, making it the largest wine and grape trade show in the Americas. With nearly 900 exhibitors across 200,000 square feet, Unified showcased the latest innovations shaping the industry.

Alicia Moore (aka P!nk) was the keynote speaker, sharing her optimism about wine's resilience noting, "It's a complicated time for wine, but people have been making and drinking the stuff for over 8,000 years, so I'm not ready to bring down the curtain on it. I have faith that it'll bounce back."

Collaborating with allied organizations to enhance the value and resilience of the winegrape industry.

State Legislative Review

CAWG had a busy 2025 representing winegrape growers in the California State Legislature and with state agencies in the Newsom Administration. CAWG Board Members and staff thank all who came to CAWG's Advocacy Day in April. It is important that policymakers hear directly from growers.

The legislature began the year with a commitment to make California more affordable. The report card on those efforts would likely show a D+. This is because most bills to help business owners failed, while many that increased the costs of doing business advanced. For example, SB 628 proposed a tax credit for farmers to fund overtime wages for agricultural employees. Labor unions opposed the bill. The Senate Committee on Labor, Public Employment, and Retirement rejected SB 628 even as more than 30 farmworkers testified in support.



CAWG had an ambitious agenda in 2025 and also worked to defeat several damaging bills. Below is a high-level summary of what was on CAWG's plate.

CAWG Sponsored Legislation:

- SB 279 (McNerney): Composting on Ag Land – SIGNED INTO LAW
- AB 1322 (Ag Comm): Crush Report Date Changes – SIGNED INTO LAW
- SB 628 (Grove): Ag Overtime Tax Credit – WILL REVISIT IN JANUARY
- AB 717 (Aguilar-Curry): Irrigation Ponds – DEFEATED

Both SB 628 and AB 717 were defeated. SB 628 was granted reconsideration in its first hearing and may be heard again in January.

Key Bills Supported by CAWG: CAWG supported increased funding through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund for alternatives to open ag burning. That funding was not finalized in 2025, and CAWG will continue the effort in 2026. Other bills CAWG supported:

- AB 457 (Soria), AB 736 (Wicks) & SB 417 (Cabaldon): Farmworker Housing – AB 457 deals with permitting and was SIGNED INTO LAW, AND both bond bills are TWO-YEAR BILLS
- AB 846 (Connolly): Incidental Take in Wildfire Preparedness – DEFEATED
- AB 1156 (Wicks): Solar Easements – TWO-YEAR BILL
- AB 1232 (Ávila Farías) – Evaluate costs of Compliance for Pending Regulations – DEFEATED
- SB 72 (Caballero): Long-term Water Supply Targets – SIGNED INTO LAW
- SB 88 (Caballero): Carbon Offsets for Biochar – SIGNED INTO LAW
- SB 458 (Niello) & SCA 3 (Niello): Cleaned up Initiative Process – TWO-YEAR BILLS

Key Bills Opposed by CAWG: In 2025, CAWG faced several bills that were strongly backed by labor unions and environmental groups. Key bills CAWG opposed:

- AB 1136 (Ortega): Immigrant Return to Work Requirement – SIGNED INTO LAW
- AB 1234 (Ortega): New 30% Penalty on Wage Orders – DEFEATED
- AB 1243 (Addis), SB 222 (Wiener) & SB 684 (Menjivar): Increased costs for fuel, fertilizer, etc. – TWO-YEAR BILLS
- AB 1331 (Elhawary): Employee Surveillance – TWO-YEAR BILL
- AB 1336 (Addis): Workers Comp for Heat Illness – VETOED
- AB 1362 (Kalra): Duplicative Program for Foreign Labor Contractors – SIGNED INTO LAW
- SB 89 (Weber Pierson): Prohibition on sale of Glyphosate. – TWO-YEAR BILL
- SB 238 (Smallwood-Cuevas): Workplace Notice of Surveillance – TWO-YEAR BILL
- SB 295 (Hurtado): Eliminate the Crush Report – DEFEATED
- SB 601 (Allen): New Permitting Agricultural Activities – DEFEATED
- SB 310 (Weiner): Reverse PAGA Reforms made in 2024 – DEFEATED
- SB 470 (Laird): Remote Hearings of State Boards – SIGNED INTO LAW

Regulatory Issues: CAWG staff serves on two Cal/OSHA advisory committees—gate safety and autonomous tractors. Unfortunately, efforts to fix the autonomous tractor regulation remain slow. Gate regulations are moving faster, but CAWG is pushing for amendments to make inspection requirements more manageable. CAWG will continue efforts on both issues in 2026.

The North Coast Water Board approved its Vineyard Order in June, accepting many CAWG amendments and delaying implementation until July 2028.

2025 IN REVIEW

76.56%

Producers Voted in Favor
of Continuing the PD
Control Program

162

Communications Distributed by CAWG
To Keep Members Up-To-Date
and Informed

121

Golfers Participated in
the CAWG Foundation
Golf Tournament

65

CAWG Member
Meetings Held
With Legislators

546

Members Attended
Educational Events Offered
by CAWG

300

Members Traveled to Sacramento in November
2024 to Celebrate CAWG's 50th Anniversary
Including Past Presidents & Founding Members

13

Winegrower Associations
Partnered with CAWG on
Vineyard Mapping Project

6,760

Views to CAWG's
Substack Channel,
Launched this Year

100

Members
Participated in
CAWG's Annual
Meeting

\$41,000

Awarded in Scholarships by the CAWG
Foundation to Eleven Children of
California Vineyard Employees

TWO

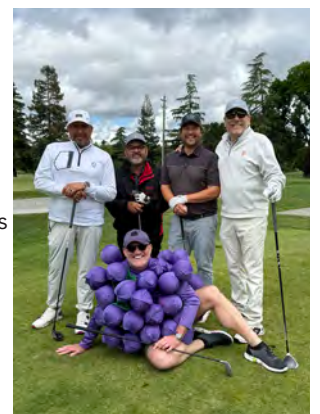
New State Laws
Sponsored by CAWG
in 2025

CAWG Foundation Scholarship Program

The CAWG Foundation awarded \$41,000 in college scholarships to eleven students whose parent or legal guardian is employed by a California winegrape grower. Recipients were selected by the CAWG Foundation Board of Directors based on the students' achievements, including academic performance, involvement in extracurricular activities, financial need, and a commitment to public service and community engagement.

Since the program's inception in 1998, the CAWG Foundation has awarded 212 scholarships totaling \$680,500. Thank you to CAWG members and the California wine community for your generous donations to CAWG Foundation scholarship funds.

"This scholarship program reflects our deep appreciation for the families who are vital to the success of California's winegrape industry," said Craig Ledbetter of Vino Farms, Chair of the CAWG Foundation Board of Directors. "Each year, we are inspired by the talent, resilience, and dedication of the students who apply. Their commitment to education and community service is truly remarkable."



CAWG Political Action Committee (PAC)

As the only statewide organization exclusively dedicated to protecting and promoting the interests of winegrape growers before the California Legislature, U.S. Congress, and state and federal regulators, CAWG has been instrumental in shaping sound public policies. Through advocacy efforts on state and federal legislation, CAWG has championed improvements in immigration, water, and labor laws, increased funding for viticulture research and plant and pests management, availability of federal crop insurance for grapes, development and promotion of sustainable farming practices, and more.



Help CAWG continue to be a meaningful part of the conversation.

Thank You!

Relation Insurance Services,
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for more than 25 years.



OUR MISSION: To protect and promote the interests
of California winegrape growers through advocacy,
education, and collaboration.



1121 L Street, Suite 304 • Sacramento, CA 95814
cawg.org • (916) 379-8995