



Mother Nature never ceases to amaze.

When one's business is farming, you are by necessity acutely aware of and impacted by every subtle change in the weather. You feel the shifts in wind direction. You notice changes in humidity. With every step on your property you subconsciously sense the tilth of the soil profile below you.

This year... Mother Nature wasn't so subtle.

April brought the first significant event. Beginning with the "Ides of April" our temperatures dropped precipitously. From the 13th through the 17th the recorded lows at most of our sites were below freezing. This was far more than a typical frost event. It isn't uncommon for us to see damage to vines planted in low-lying areas at or just above 200 feet during Spring. This was a cold front from the Pacific that affected vineyards as high as 600 feet in elevation.

The timing of that freeze caused extensive damage. It coincided with the point in time that we have "bud break", which is the first appearance of green tissue from the dormant buds. Each dormant bud is in fact three buds that coexist within the same bud case. The primary is the first to develop and without damage will generally produce two clusters in a growing season. If the primary is damaged the secondary bud develops. A secondary bud would be expected to develop one smaller than normal cluster during the growing season. If both the primary and secondary are completely destroyed by freeze then there is a third or tertiary bud that will likely produce a somewhat underfed shoot with leaves but generally no clusters.

The cold of mid-April caused losses of primary buds in our sites that varied from 40% to 80%. It was the worst damage our industry has ever seen due to Spring freeze damage. We looked at the experience of other regions that are prone to freeze damage to understand what we could expect in crop level. It wasn't pretty. If we had a typical year going forward we would likely have 1 to 1.5 tons per acre. At those levels it is virtually impossible to cover your farming expenses.....much less have any profitability. The prospects were grim.

The freeze damage essentially caused a restart of the season. During May we finally began to get development but as a rule, we were 3 weeks late and remained so through the rest of the season.

Each berry begins life as a flower. Our flowers have both male and female parts so we are self-fertilizing. No bees necessary. We are, however, dependent on good weather during flowering to achieve good levels of fertility. Cold and wet weather would result in poor fertility with perhaps 40% to 60% of the flowers becoming berries. Warm temperatures and clear skies would likely bring 65% to 80% fertility. Due to everything happening later in the calendar our period of flowering took place in early July rather than June. The weather was stunningly perfect.

Testing for fertility is done 10 to 14 days following full flower. It's a simple concept. You simply cup the cluster in one hand and gently brush the cluster with the other. The berries that have fertilized remain on the stem (rachis) while those that did not fall off into your palm. A percentage level of fertility is easily calculated knowing the counts of each.

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When we walked and checked our sites, virtually nothing was falling off into our palms. The perfect weather of last July had provided the highest level of fertility that I have seen in my 45 vintages. Probably 90% to 95%. So...though we had fewer clusters the clusters we had were twice the weight typical of Pinot noir.

That was Miracle Number One.

Miracle Number One gave us hope that we could still succeed in the 2022 vintage. But we continued to be weeks behind and the expected rain events and cooling of mid-October were looming. We would need an amazing fall to pull this rabbit out of the hat.

September was dry as dust and exceptionally warm. We had a total of less than 1/2 inch of rain for the month. 17 of Septembers' 30 days had temperatures well above the normal range for our region. Then the vines were clearly accelerating ripeness now and the 3 week delay we had being seeing during the season was shrinking quickly. Now onto October and we are knocking on wood.

October blew our minds. We had zero rain until October 21st and by then we were in the barn and out of harm's way. Of those first 20 days of October fully 18 days were above the normal range of high temperatures. Nine of those days were in the 80's! To say we finished with a flourish doesn't begin to describe how fantastic October was for us.

That was Miracle Number Two.

We are close to our grape-growing brethren all over the world and none can recall such an incredible recovery as we saw this year in the northern Willamette Valley. It defied all prior recorded experience. When you are working hand in hand with Mother Nature the lessons just keep coming.

We are very excited to show the results of this dramatic vintage to you at our upcoming Open House. The detail, complexity and balance of the vintage are classic World Class Willamette Valley Pinot noir. Please join us on November 19 or 20 from 10am- 4pm, at the winery, you can RSVP by visiting our website.

-Ken Wright

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of the letters 'K' and 'W' joined together, with a vertical line extending downwards from the 'W'.

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