FRESNO COUNTY 1967 GRAPE CROP

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The 1967 grape season is one many Fresno County growers will long remember as the big hail-damage year and the year the Emperor table grapes didn't set. The season was just getting underway with the new vine shoots only a few inches long when severe hail storms hit the Biola-Kerman district. 17,500 Fresno County acres were hit badly in this high producing, predominantly Thompson Seedless district, with an estimated crop loss of over 100,000 tons of grapes. Damage ranged from 10% to over 90% of the flower cluster forms knocked off in the various vineyards.

Continued rain and cool weather through much of the spring slowed vine development. The result was a bloom in early June, slightly more than two weeks behind normal and 3½ weeks behind the 1966 bloom dates.

The fruit set of most of our seeded table grape varieties was poor and irregular. This was attributed to the unusual spring weather. Cardinals, Ribiers, Red Malagas, Almerias, Calmerias, and particularly Emperors were affected. The Emperor crop was about 1/3 of normal and of variable quality. The result was the lowest cold storage holdings in over 20 years.

Table grape harvest began nearly two weeks behind normal. This resulted in a relatively high and short peak in shipment volume. This and the variable quality meant disappointing prices to many growers. The seasonal delay also stopped the berry and cluster size in Thompson Seedless. This smaller crop size helped speed the rate at ripening so that maturity during the raisin lay was about normal.

The wine grape harvest proceeded slowly due to a labor shortage. Fortunately, the late, warm fall allowed a complete and successful grape crush.

Grower interest in University mechanical harvesting research and commercial machine harvester developments was high. A 10-acre Thompson Seedless block was successfully harvested for winery. Test rows of other wine varieties were also evaluated. A number of Fresno County growers have contracted a limited acreage for mechanical harvesting in 1968 or are beginning to convert some vineyard blocks with mechanical harvesting in mind.

Overall, not many Fresno County grape growers will consider 1967 a good year. Raisin and wine grape prices were somewhat strengthened from the lower tonnages. However, many individuals' net profits were not increased from 1966 because of the 15-40% or more drop in yields. An additional factor in the 1967 marketing picture was the formation and operation of the Raisin Bargaining Association.