1966 GRAPE SEASON - FRESNO COUNTY

Peter Christensen, Farm Advisor

1966 was representative of an early and hot growing season.

Bud break in most varieties was fairly normal. However, the exceptionally warm spring hastened vine development so that bloom was nearly complete by the second week in May— the earliest since 1959. Cluster counts in the Thompson Seedless variety were fairly equal to those in 1965 with most wine varieties down slightly. Muscat of Alexandria vineyards experienced the most difficulties with an irregular bud break, weak shoot growth, and a lower cluster count in many cases. This problem was apparently a natural set-back from previous large crops.

A sudden hot spell in mid-June caused estimated fruit losses between 15% and 20% in Thompson Seedless table grapes and about 5% in Muscat of Alexandria vineyards. Damage to other vineyards was generally considered light and scattered.

The first Perlette and Cardinal table grapes were harvested in the first week of July, 10-14 days ahead of normal. This earlier pattern then followed through the Thompson Seedless harvest. Raisin harvest began August 15 and was in full swing August 22. By the end of August most good Thompson Seedless vineyards with normal crops were testing 19.5 to 20 degree Balling which was two to three weeks earlier than in 1965.

The hot weather advanced maturity but also seemed to enhance a serious spider mite problem particularly in certain vineyard areas west of Highway 99. The soil moisture demands of the hot weather also contributed to a leaf burn condition in weak spots. Increasing fruit damage from the new grape pest Omnivorous Leaf Roller should be of particular concern.

The wine grape harvest went relatively smooth. Raisin drying conditions were good except for a spotty rain in the last week of September. A few vineyards suffered serious damage but fortunately, it was quite spotty. Color development and harvest of Emperor table grapes proceeded slowly.

Acreage trends show some pulling of old, marginal Emperor and Muscat vineyards and interest in planting the better wine varieties French Colombard, Ruby Cabernet, Barbera, and Tinta Madeira.