

YEAR-END SUMMARY, FRESNO COUNTY 1976

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The September tropical rains caused Fresno County vineyardists to incur the highest losses in the grape industry. This was largely due to the heavy raisin losses in the field. The estimated 240 thousand ton raisin crop was reduced to an earlier estimated 70 thousand marketable tons. Reconditioning efforts by growers, dehydrator operators and raisin packers, however, have increased the salable crop of sun-dried Thompson Seedless up to 110 thousand tons.

Much of the credit for this higher estimate goes to a recently developed method of eliminating damaged raisins by a "wash and dry" system. It employs a hot water dip, an auger-conveyor back-wash, and then tunnel drying. Industry sources now expect a substantial raisin-lay in 1977 to fill our depleted raisin market channels. This, along with the good demand for dry white wine, should help to firm the demand for Thompson Seedless in 1977. Hopefully the raisin growers will be able to regain part of their 1976 economic losses.

The late August-September rains also created difficulties in wine grapes because of Botrytis rot infections, especially in tight clustered varieties, such as Chenin blanc, Carignane, and Barbera. Additional losses occurred from unharvestable fruit and DM prices for some loads.

The early to mid-season table grape varieties had good quality and a firm market, but the later cold storage varieties, such as Emperor and Calmeria, had extensive rain damage. Cold storage holdings were down almost 50%, largely due to Botrytis rot infections in the field.

All, except 1500 to 2000 acres, of Fresno County's new wine grape acreage is now in production. Only a very limited new acreage of wine grapes is anticipated and these will be mostly of Chenin blanc. Some older acreage of standard black varieties is being pulled.

Most of the interest is in planting Thompson Seedless along with a limited acreage of table grapes and the early-ripening raisin variety Fiesta. Some expansion of raisin dehydrator facilities is expected due to this year's rain damage.

Phylloxera is generally present in our older table and wine grape districts located east and southeast of Fresno. However, most of these vineyards are on sandy loam soils where growers can "live" with the problem for many years before vineyard pull out is required. The largest proportion of the resistant rootstocks are used for nematode problems on our very sandy soils. Harmony is presently the most widely used rootstock, but our total acreage on rootstock is still below 5%.

Dead arm is an increasing disease problem and Eutypa die-back has been identified in widely scattered vineyard areas in Fresno County. The use of fungicides for Botrytis and bunch rot control is on the increase due to the experience of two successive harvest-time rainfall years.