

FRESNO COUNTY 1972

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1972 will long be remembered as the year that was. It was a year of high quality, higher prices, generally moderate yields, but with enough extremes to produce many feast or famine returns. The total production was well below the annual average; however, vineyards with excellent yields were not too hard to find scattered throughout the county.

Spring started bright, warm and early following a record dry winter. Early growth was good, but cluster counts were down. In general, this was attributed to the heavy cropping level of 1971 coupled with a very late season. Wood maturity and bud fruitfulness were poor and the totally unnecessary early fall freeze presented the final blow.

So with the makings of a light 1972 crop, we experienced the severe spring frost on March 27. Its effect was scattered depending on vineyard location and cultural practices and was responsible for lowering the potential 1973 tonnage another 15-20%.

The effect of the short crop, freeze and overall wine industry boom were felt by all segments of the industry. Table grape quality and demand were good with prices remaining very attractive throughout the season. The demand for all varieties for crushing was strong and prices were good with some varieties experiencing new valley highs.

The raisin industry felt the greatest impact of the frost and changing market trends. This combination of events resulted in driving prices up to the astounding figure of \$500/ton for natural Thompsons.

The 1972 season received its crowning touch with the arrival of rain when about 90% of the natural raisin crop was in various stages of drying on the trays. Careful grower handling of a very valuable damaged crop, its original high quality and industry-wide cooperation prevented a tough situation from becoming a disaster.

Fresno County acreage now stands at over 180 thousand acres (35% of the California total) with 10% of this acreage non-bearing.

The County now has over 25,000 acres of wine grape varieties, half of which are non-bearing. About 2,400 acres of Barbera were planted in 1972 bringing our total to 4,200 acres or roughly a third of the State's Barbera acreage.

Rubired was next with 1,000 acres planted in 1972 and doubling the acreage in Fresno County. The story was just about the same for Ruby Cabernet.

French Colombard is our leading wine grape variety with 4,500 acres; Barbera is now a close second with 4,200. We then have roughly equal quantities of Alicante, Carignane, Grenache, Rubired and Ruby Cabernet.