# 1968 GRAPE SEASON, FRESNO COUNTY

by
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Generally Fresno County, with its predominant Thompson Seedless production, had a fairly good grape season. It would not be a normal year without a few abnormalities, such as some spring frost damage and some serious insect and spider mite pest problems. On April 22 some vineyards in the riverbottom areas and in the Biola, Kerman, Herndon, and Clovis districts were frosted. It was particularly unfortunate that many of the frosted vineyards were those which had been damaged by hail the year before. The overall effect of the frost on the 1968 production was small, with less than 1% of Fresno County's grape acreage severely affected. Many vineyards, particularly in the Caruthers district, has serious spider mite and Omnivorous leaf roller (OLR) infestations in 1968. Some of the OLR damage in the fruit led to mold problems and the reconditioning of some lots of raisins.

The growing season was a hot one with 44 days of 100°F and over. In July a "water berry" or cluster shrivel condition appeared in many vineyards. This resulted in some "self-thinning" of fruit, particularly where crops were large, and reduced the pack-out in some Thompson Seedless table grape vineyards. The earlier grape maturity and relatively good quality contributed to an orderly harvest and a well balanced utilization into the raisin, wine, table, and cannery segments. A firm domestic raisin tonnage price of $312.50 was established soon after the required number of raisin packers accepted the Raisin Bargaining Association offer.

The new minimum raisin maturity standards established by the industry were begun in 1968. This meant that some raisins required additional removal of immature raisins before packing house delivery. Many raisin growers are looking to bloomtime thinning gibberellin sprays to further improve grape maturity for raisin harvest.

The season came to a quick close with October rains. This was before all of the rolled raisins could be picked up and brought out of the field. The result was numerous homemade farmyard raisin dryers built mostly after the design of a Biola district grower. The rains also cut short the Emperor and storage table grape harvest.

Most of the interest in grape plantings continues in wine varieties such as French Columbard and Tinta Madeira. Pullouts are most noticeable in Emperor and Muscat of Alexandria vineyards. Our once substantial Muscat acreage is expected to continue its present rate of decline until most of the lower yielding vineyards are pulled and/or total returns improve.