



CRAWFORD BECK VINEYARD

Musings

November 25, 2006

The harvest is complete, the wine is now in barrels (so it really is wine now, not just must), and the leaves have fallen from the vines. The 2006 harvest was a success and there were no mishaps, major or minor. We brought in more fruit than we expected, twice as much in the case of the chardonnay, 42.3 tons in total. We have tasted the chardonnay and the pinot gris in the barrels, and, while they are very, very young and I cannot predict anything, we are optimistic about the possibility of a single vineyard designation for both grapes. The winemaker has not discouraged our optimism, but the decision is solely his and not ours, and he will not make it for a few more months anyway. The pinot noir is still going through malolactic fermentation, but we hope to taste the pinot noir in January.

Jeanne and I were sure that the winter would be a time of rest and freedom, but it seems that the decision to take more agribusiness courses has squashed that notion. Most of the bird netting is still on the vines, and we must get that done soon. Tractor servicing, building a shelter for our spot-a-pot (I know that that is more than you want to know), and planting 100 red twig dogwoods still await our attentions. But the lab in the new barn is finished and I have found all my tools. I have also found that I need more tools! Jeanne and I (yes, Jeanne too) will take a tractor maintenance course in January, and I will take a welding course in the spring as well. You would not know our Jeanne. She is a real farm hand and is letting no opportunity pass her by. She passed forklift training a few weeks ago and is now qualified to drive a Hyster.

We are trying to diversify some of our farming activities, and are planning a number of new enterprises. The first is in olives. To determine how well they will grow here we have planted 12 *Olea europaea* Arbequina plants. Others are growing the Arbequina cultivar in Oregon and it is already doing quite well in California. The oil is spicy and yellowish green, and the fruits are small and very mild. If the first 12 trees are promising, we will plant more trees, maybe 100 in

total. An oil extraction facility is planned for this area and we know the people who are already in the business.

Although the vines are now bare and the bees and birds are gone (except for the quail which we expect to sample this winter), there is still life and beauty in the vineyard. We marvel at the skeletal shapes of the various vines, canes reaching upward to where I cut them short in an effort to force their energies back into the fruit below. Some shoots point straight upward, and some are a lot less disciplined. The pinot noir in Block J are so neatly spaced that they look like soldiers *en garde*. It is surely our imagination, but the canes on the overproducing chardonnay in Blocks B and G look sort of limp and exhausted by the ordeal.

We are planning our farming strategies for next year now, but the challenge will be to extract all the information from this year's records to decide about soil management, grafting or replanting some of the vines that are in the wrong places, and whether we can improve our canopy management practices. These decisions evolve out of iterative discussions, and by January or early February they will become our 2007 approach to the vineyard. While we smugly shrug our shoulders and say, "What's the big deal?" we really know deep down that the success of this year's harvest could very well in large measure be the upside of a cycle that we can find all too soon has downsides as well. That is, maybe we did nothing right or wrong, but Mother Nature was just generous and kind to us.

So we will give many thanks for the beauty around us, enjoy the love of family and the irreplaceable warmth of good friends, and enjoy the wine we have made this year and of course share it with those last two groups. Sippy, perhaps, and maybe the tryptophan overload from the Thanksgiving turkey has damaged my brain, but we really do want to share our joy of growing winegrapes with you.