

# Wet winter could create memorable EDC vintage

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE — With the sudden heat wave, it can seem like last winter's deluge was in some other decade. For El Dorado County vintners, it's all in a day's work to contend with whatever Mother Nature brings.

Growing grapes is farming. And all farmers know they are at the whim of the weather.

Coming out of multiple years of drought, though, is bringing a bit of optimism to many in the foothills.



El Dorado County winemakers are thrilled with the moisture that fell this past winter. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Elliot and Sherrie Graham, owners of Busby Cellars, dry farm 7

of the 15 acres that are planted. That acreage without irrigation yielded 4 tons of grapes last year. This compares to 14 tons in 2012.

They are hoping this year will be similar to 2006 which followed two dry years. That vintage saw 40 tons of grapes from the whole 15 acres.

Grape vines can have roots that are 20-feet deep, so it takes a bit of water to reach that depth.

While many vineyards were sitting in several inches of water during the winter, this was no big deal because the vines are dormant. Trouble would come if that same ponding were to occur between now and harvest in late summer/early fall.

The abundance of winter moisture is expected to bring in yields that have not been recorded for years. And while robust harvests can actually mean the quality is less, the opposite tends to be true when the higher tonnage comes after a year or two of dry conditions.



Vaughn Jodar respects Mother Nature, knowing

she always has another lesson to teach.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

At Jodar Vineyard and Winery the rocky mountain side makes it near impossible to keep any moisture in the ground by the vines. Five wells on the 40-acre parcel provide water to the vineyard and the family house.

“Two years ago we were really frightened,” owner Vaughn Jodar told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We were surprised we still had water.”

Vineyard managers would draw on the wells early in the morning to irrigate, then overnight the aquifer was refreshed. The drought that finally came to an end this winter tested those wells more than they had been in the last 30 years.

“There are many lessons you don’t want to learn, but Mother Nature will teach you,” Jodar said.

The Placerville area received about 80 inches of rain this past winter. Bud-break was normal, coming in April. But a frost last month damaged vines in the region. At Madrona it hit some of the Chardonnay and Cabernet grapes.

“In 2015, a lot of berries didn’t mature, though the quality was off the charts,” Paul Bush, Madrona owner, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I think this could be a bumper crop and exceptional quality this year. It will depend on the summertime temperatures.”