



American Vineyard



Grape Grower & PCA

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**Mexico Takes Larger Share
of US Table Grape Market**
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May Central Coast Vineyard Tasks

IGGPRA Continues to Support Members Virtually

By Matthew Malcolm, Assistant Editor (matthew@malcolmmmedia.com)



Beautiful Paso Robles Vineyard

Operating in a Pandemic Environment

The wine grape vineyards of the Central Coast are alive and vibrant again, and farm employees are busy preparing the vines for a new crop. Despite the threat of COVID-19, these essential tasks must continue in order to have a successful season; however, growers and farm labor contractors are taking extra precautions to ensure the safety and health of their crews. Mindy Allen, owner of Martinez Farming, is one such farm labor contractor.

Allen has been working in agriculture since 2000, and started serving the local grape industry with her farm-labor contracting company in 2010. She also operates vineyard consulting, spraying and equipment businesses in the Central Coast. Like others in the business, Allen is taking things one day at a time amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. “The news, as well as laws and regulations regarding worker health and safety during this pandemic are changing

all the time,” she expressed. “So we really need to stay on top of things the best we can, particularly for our fellow farm labor contractors out there. If these conditions continue through harvest, there will certainly be new safety measures to implement as we learn more.”

As a Board Member of the Independent Grape Growers of



Mindy Allen, owner of Martinez Farming and Independent Grape Growers of Paso Robles Area Board Member

Paso Robles Area (IGGPRA), she recently spoke with local growers on the topic through an online video conference, in lieu of the monthly seminar gathering the IGGPRA growers association. “Education is key here,” Allen explained. “We need to educate our crews of the current status of this virus and how they can help to combat the spread. We are training them to exercise appropriate social distancing and not to share food. Cleaning the bathrooms is important after each use, including spraying down the inside, cleaning handles on the outside... Many of these safety and sanitation procedures are likely to become permanent.”

Many of these responsibilities fall on the farm labor contractors to ensure their workers’ safety. Growers that wish to minimize exposure to employees and other hired help should communicate primarily with farm labor contractors and crew supervisors over the phone, making detailed plans ahead of time. During the online IGGPRA meeting, one grower pointed out that vineyards often have lock boxes for chemicals and supplies, or perhaps a gate keypad to get into the property. To further limit the spread of germs, growers can have those things open prior to arrival of their employees.

Allen pointed out that there are not enough masks to go around, but fortunately, most employees already mask their faces with bandanas and other materials. Sometimes you just have to work with what you’ve got

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Vineyard Tasks

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and improvise. Some folks are making their own hand-sanitizer for their crews, due to the lack of availability.

May Vineyard Chores

Unfortunately, one cannot just improvise when it comes to having the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) for pesticide applications. Tis the season for fungicide sprays, and as IGGPRA Board Member Linnea Norton pointed out in her part of the webinar, some growers may



Linnea Norton, COO at Vineyard Professional Services and Independent Grape Growers of Paso Robles Area Board Member

not be able to make certain applications due to a lack of N-95 masks or other necessary PPE.

Norton has been working in the Central Coast Grape Industry since 2005. She became a vineyard manager for Vineyard Professional Services after she graduated from Cal



Poly with a double major in Viticulture and Soil Science. Since March of this year, she is working as the Chief Operating Officer for the company, which manages about 2500 acres in the Central Coast – primarily in Paso Robles. If you haven't met her, you probably know her father Maxwell Norton, who served as the UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor in Merced County for many years.

“April through June is the most dynamic time in the vineyard with so much to do,” Norton shared. “If you haven't done so already, make sure you have a plan and budget for the season. You can hope for the best, but plan and budget for the worst.”

Speaking with growers on April 15th, Norton expressed that Central Coast growers were coming up on their first fungicide spray at the end of April. As spray intervals generally range between 10-14 days (depending on the label), growers should be moving on to their second spray in the beginning of May and third application mid-May. Growers should also be applying their first contact herbicide, based on the needs of the vineyard the specific weeds they are targeting.

“Central coast gophers and ground squirrels are getting active again in the vineyard, so it's time to get back on your vertebrate pest control program, whether that be baiting with strychnine or trapping,” she noted.

Growers often inject strychnine into the soil with burrow builder equipment; however, Norton added, “It doesn't work well when the ground is too wet or too dry, so we have just a small window of opportunity to utilize this in the spring.”

May is a great time for soil and foliar applied fertilizers – nitrogen in the early season, followed by calcium and other micronutrients that can be applied foliarly a little

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Tis the season for fungicide applications

as the threat of frost lingers around generally up until Memorial Day,” Norton added.

Vineyard crews are going to be actively shoot-thinning, as well as training young vines. With the

young vines, it is important to focus on good establishment and not let the growth get too carried away in their initial years.

These were just a couple of presentations of many seminars/webinars the IGGPRA will be holding this year. 



Don't let the cover crops get too carried away as long as there is a threat of frost.

later. “You want to get them on prior to bloom,” she said.

Growers should be mowing/incorporating their grasses/cover crops into the soil. “Make sure your cover crops don't get too big,



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