

Oregon Viticulture Roundtable

Minimizing vineyard costs for uncontracted fruit

April 13, 2020

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Background

On April 13, 2020 Dr. Patty Skinkis, OSU Viticulture Extension Specialist, led a roundtable discussion with fellow OSU extension agents and Oregon vineyard managers on the best practices for decommissioning a vineyard for a year, and options for minimizing vineyard work to reduce labor costs without harm to future vintages.

Dr. Jay Pscheidt, OSU Extension Plant Pathologist, provided recommendations for effectively minimizing spray programs for both sulfur only and synthetic programs.

Dr. Vaughn Walton, OSU Horticultural Entomologist, provided guidance on managing insects and pests.

Below is a summary of the key discussion points from the viticulture roundtable call with industry experts and OSU extension agents. The Oregon Wine Board and Oregon State University do not endorse the below practices and would recommend those interested in more detail about these approaches to reach out to your extension agent or vineyard manager.

Suggestions for minimal farming

Cane pruned vineyards:

- Pruning: Most growers have already pruned and laid down canes. Completely abandoning pruning is not recommended in Oregon, as it may overly tax the vine and will lead to an overall devigoring of the vine.
- Minimizing canopy management costs: the efficacy of the spray program should not be sacrificed. On wider spaced rows shoot thinning can be abandoned, this is not recommended for the tightest vineyard rows and minimal or machine shoot thinning should be employed.
- Shoot thin the head and identify next year's canes to preserve the wood.
- No shoot positioning just lift the wires and leave the canopy hang.
- If you are not going to harvest or sell the fruit leave the fruit on the vine. Patty has not noticed reduction in yields the following year and the California extension agents report the same.

Cordon/spur pruned vineyards:

- Pruning: hedge w/mechanical prepruner; if hand is only option, non-selective pruning 3 - 4 buds including basal bud.
- Wires: do not raise.
- Fertilizer: none.
- Irrigation: just enough to keep leaves on.
- Suckering/Shoot-thinning: none.

Minimum Spray program:

- No need for a botryticide since we had a dry fall.
- Fungicide sprays for powdery mildew earlier the better to flatten the curve and focus sprays around bloom.
- No adjuvants needed.
- Slow down the tractor and get more spray coverage per acre.
- Time your sprays:
 - Sulfur only: spraying 7-10 days
 - Synthetics 14 days until you get through bloom and then lessen sprays to 3 weeks

Herbicide use:

- Limit herbicide, especially as it looks to be a dry season.
- Vineyards can successfully skip a year of herbicide use and rely on mowing when weeds and grasses become tall and dry.
- Herbicide can be used to desucker or debud a vine at less cost than manual removal.
- No till can be utilized for a single year or two with little damage to the vines.
- Minimizing weeding and mowing, letting the vineyard look a little wild are good options for reducing labor costs in vineyard.