



An Interview With Winegrower Stephy Terrizzi

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By mid-July, the wine crop in the Paso Robles-Templeton area of California's Central Coast region was developing at close to the normal pace, reports grower Stephy Terrizzi who works with various vineyards throughout the Paso Robles AVA.

This was after unseasonably warm winter temperatures propelled the crop to one of the earliest starts in memory and after vine growth and fruit development lagged behind the typical rate due to unusually cool spring weather, which persisted into the first week or two of June.

That's when the day-time high temperature soared from around 75 degrees one day to the 100-degree mark the next.

"We jumped from spring to summer almost overnight," Terrizzi says. "Now it feels like the crop is pretty much on track with other years. Total degree-days are similar to 2012. All varieties have started changing color and by the third week of July many varieties are over half done with veraison."

In fact, by July 9, she estimates, Pinot Noir in the Edna Valley just south of the Paso Robles AVA, was already at 40 percent veraison.

"I'm glad we don't have Pinot Noir because we're not ready yet," Terrizzi says. "We have to bottle in August to free up the barrels for the 2015 wines. Those dates are in stone!"

She finished cane thinning the second week of June and a month later was getting ready to cover the vines with bird netting.

Her work includes the Luna Matta Vineyard on the west side of Paso Robles AVA, where she has been managing the property's 37 acres of organically-grown Rhône and Italian varieties for the past nine years. Here she also tends 4.5 acres of estate-grown Italian varieties for Giornata Winery, which she and her husband and winemaker, Brian, own.

The Terrizzis also source about 450 tons of Cabernet Sauvignon for Broadside winery. **"I am responsible for making sure this fruit is the best quality it can be by working throughout the growing season with our growers," Stephy notes**

Based on Stephy's observations and what other growers have told her, she's assessing the crop load in the Paso Robles AVA as similar to last year. That's after averaging reports from some who see a little heavier crop than in 2014 and others who predict the amount of shatter this year will hold yields

below those of last year.

The best-looking varieties she's seeing are the Italian varieties, Mourvèdre, Merlot, and Petite Verdot.

"Our Italian grapes look beautiful with a nice full set," Stephy says. "And the Petite Verdot looks to have an amazingly full crop, despite the usual shatter due to the full bunches.

Cabernet Sauvignon didn't finish setting fruit this year until the last week of June, Stephy says. Both that variety and Grenache are reported to have had poor sets throughout most of the county. Shattering has been a problem for most growers this season.

Another disappointment is a vineyard she works with on the west side of the Paso Robles AVA, which was irrigated just once or twice last year. Syrah is one of the few varieties she needs to irrigate there because the canopy is prone to crashing without water late in the season

As a result, the clusters this year are really small," Stephy says. "Vine growth is decent. But, because of the drought, they have just one cluster per shoot. The plants are saying they didn't have enough water. Only a handful of vineyards in Paso Robles are dry-farmed. I think one of them was in irrigation tubes in mid-July."

Otherwise, ground water supplies have kept pace with irrigation demands. Most growers, she notes, began irrigating in early April. Meanwhile, pumping rates continue to decline. **"I know of wells that were producing 35 gallons a minute four years ago, that are now pumping only 22 gallons per minutes."**

Until the threat of powdery mildew subsided with the start of berry ripening, vineyards had been under some fairly high pressure from this fungal disease.

Contributing to this were two rains in June and a number of very foggy mornings west of Paso Robles and the east side of the Templeton area. **"Powdery mildew pressure was really bad the last two weeks of June," she says. "Then, in the first week of July, the disease went crazy after it rained just enough to keep the dust down and the weeds happy, including yellow starthistle. It seems to be the only weed growing now."**

On July 19, major thunderstorms dropped two to three inches of rain in Paso Robles by noon, Stephy adds.

In a trial she began last year, she covered two acres of Nebbiolo vines on the west side of Paso Robles this year in May with 30-percent shade cloth, like those used to protect raspberry vines from sun burn.

"It reduces sun burn by decreasing the amount of direct sunlight on the green berries," Stephy says. "Because of its western exposure, the late afternoon heat is a problem in this area."

At times she's noticed sun damage on green berries of Nebbiolo, as well as Petite Syrah, vines following large, sudden spikes in temperatures. The idea of the shade block is to reduce sun burn by slowing photosynthesis and reducing the shock of high temperatures, until the berries can become acclimated to the heat.

Last year, the shade cloth prevented sun burn here. However, when the shade cloth was left up through harvest, the covered area took longer to ripen.

"I assume the shade cloth affected the rate of photosynthesis," she says. "This year, we'll remove the shade cloth in mid- to late-August. We may experiment with different timing. I hope to remove the cloth when temperatures moderate – that is, if Mother Nature complies."

