

## CAFF partners with Central Coast Farmers and Ag Groups to Share Water Conservation and Management Techniques for Vineyards



Building on two years of workshops and farm tours through our Lighthouse Farm Network, Community Alliance with Family Farmers has been helping Central Coast farmers learn from their peers to improve their on-farm practices with innovative techniques to increase biodiversity and wildlife habitat, conserve water resources, and manage pests naturally. In 2012 CAFF hosted a variety of webinars, field days and workshops reaching hundreds of local growers through our Lighthouse Network efforts.



One event, “**Dry Farming in the Central Coast AVA: Starting the Dialogue,**” was held at **Tablas Creek Vineyard on August 22nd, 2012 in Paso Robles.** In addition to the speakers and organizers, twenty-five people attended the event, the majority of whom either owned vineyards or were employed by local vineyards. Attendees were given a packet including a case study on Frog’s Leap’s practices dry-farming, a spreadsheet comparing dry-farming management practices, and information on water stewardship and the Paso Robles water basin.

The event started in the morning with a meet and greet. The first speaker was Dave Runsten, Policy Director at Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF). His talk presented an overview of the importance of dry farming and of CAFF’s work to create and promote a dry-farming network. Next, Kris Beal, Executive Director of the Central Coast Vineyard Team, presented background information regarding the decline in the water levels of Paso Robles basin and the need for water stewardship in the area.

Jean-Pierre Wolff, owner and vintner at Wolff Vineyards, spoke about his experiences converting his irrigated Chardonnay vineyard to a dry-farmed vineyard. In doing so, he addressed general concerns and themes that dry farmers need to think about, including economic concerns, soil type, soil management, rootstock, and vineyard site selection. He also emphasized that, since grape vines are perennial plants producing fruit for 15+ years, grape growers need to develop long-term strategic management plans, especially with growing concerns regarding climate change and water availability.



The event finished with Jason Haas, General Manager, and Levi Glenn, Viticulturist, both from Tablas Creek, speaking about their experiences and giving a tour of the vineyard. Haas spoke to the theory and motivation behind the dry-farming at Tablas Creek. He highlighted Tablas Creek’s connection to the C tes du Rh ne region of France, where dry-farming is mandated by law, and his family’s desire to replicate that traditional style of grape

growing both with grape variety choice and with vineyard architecture. Levi Glenn walked the group through the specifics of the vineyard management practices, including cultivation, canopy management, and cultural practices. During the tour of Tablas Creek's multiple dry-farmed vineyard blocks, Glenn discussed how the different grape varieties were managed. After the tour, guests were invited to have lunch, try Tablas Creek's wines, and network.

Surveys were conducted as part of our evaluation system, and responders were either vineyard owners, vineyard employees, or were starting to plant vineyards. Six people were already dry farming in some capacity, four were planning on switching to dry farming or starting a dry farmed vineyard, and the rest of the attendees were not dry farming but interested in the topic. Three individuals surveyed indicated that they were interested in dry farming because they were running out of water in their wells. The majority of the respondents were very interested in more workshops; some wanted more on dry farming, others mentioned cover crops workshops, pest control, or water management workshops.



In general, the workshop was very well received. Attendees mentioned the importance of learning about dry farming and the desire for more dry-farming workshops. One response was that the individual learned more about dry farming in this one morning than he had from all his research. Other individuals emphasized how important grower-to-grower connections are and how great workshops and field days are for that purpose.



### **Dry Farming in the Santa Cruz Mountains**

The workshop, **Dry Farming in the Santa Cruz Mountains**, was held at **Mica Cellars winery on December 6th, 2012 in Watsonville**. The majority of the 12 attendees have small vineyards for either personal or local sales.

The event had three speakers. CAFF Policy Director, David Runsten, spoke about CAFF's dry-farming program and the importance of dry farming. He also presented background information regarding the declining water levels on the Central Coast and specifically around Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley's water management plans. Next, M.S. candidate from Bard College Kendall Lambert, discussed general vineyard management techniques for dry-farmed vineyards by drawing lessons learned from CA dry-farmed growers.

Mica Raas, winemaker and vineyard consultant at Mica Cellars, spoke for the majority of the event. He gave a presentation discussing the benefits of dry farming, how to convert vineyards, and the science behind dry farming. His presentation was very informative and engaging with question and answers extending beyond the end of the event into the lunch period. Many participants stayed for lunch, and blind sampling of dry farmed wines from Mica's Cellar. Further conversations on dry farming and management techniques continued even after the event had ended.

Overall these workshops and field days have shown that there is great interest in dry farming on the Central Coast, and farmers are eager to go out into the field to network and learn from one another on a variety of on-farm conservation techniques.