

FETZER VINEYARDS®

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Corporation

# HARVEST REPORT 2021



**“THE 2021 VINTAGE IS ONE WE’LL REMEMBER FOR EXCEPTIONAL FRUIT HARVESTED FROM ALL OF OUR GROWING REGIONS. THAT DOESN’T MEAN IT WAS EASY — WE HAD TO BE ON OUR TOES FROM BUD BREAK THROUGH HARVEST AND COLLABORATION WAS ESSENTIAL.” — JOHN KANE, VICE PRESIDENT OF WINEMAKING & WINERY OPERATIONS**

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THE RESILIENCY OF THE VINES AND THE COLLABORATIVE NATURE OF FETZER VINEYARDS' TEAMS LED TO A SUCCESSFUL HARVEST.

The 2021 growing season was marked by lower-than-average rainfall and a historically warm summer, which led to lower volumes of fruit and smaller berries than in an average year. Despite stressful growing conditions and the challenges presented by the ongoing pandemic, the resiliency of the vines and the collaborative nature of Fetzer Vineyards' winegrowing, winemaking and operations teams led to a successful harvest. Fruit from estate ranches in Mendocino County as well as fruit from partner growers throughout California arrived to the winery with bright acidity, balanced flavors and excellent quality.

The harvest season kicked off several weeks ahead of historic averages, with warm temperatures and water stress leading to atypical grape ripening patterns that called for a high level of collaboration to determine optimal times for picking. Team members' vast experience allowed them collectively to make informed choices in the vineyards and in the winery, resulting in a memorable year for the wines and the successful teamwork that made it possible. The wines show notable vibrancy and dynamic varietal character, a result of the unique growing conditions and careful handling in the vineyard and cellar.

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## 2021 GROWING SEASON

Unusually cold and dry post-harvest weather in California in 2020 had a direct impact on the character of the 2021 vintage. These conditions continued through winter, putting vines into protective mode at the beginning of 2021. As soon as the weather warmed in March, the vines did not hesitate to set buds — but not as many as they would after a winter with normal rainfall. Early bud break was followed by a spring and early summer of high heat, which added more stress for the vines, particularly those not cooled by maritime effects.

The Fetzer Vineyards winegrowing and winemaking teams read the signals early on.

“When you have as much collective experience as we have, there are no surprises,” said John Kane, vice president of winemaking & winery operations. “By early spring we were well aware of water availability and fruit set in the regions where we grow and source our grapes, and we knew what we had to do.”

Low water availability from the dry winter coupled with a relatively warm growing season meant growers had to be particularly precise with irrigation and canopy management to help vines naturally rebalance themselves to the reduced water availability. Water was rationed throughout the season, and vine canopies had to do double duty to assist in photosynthesis while keeping vines and clusters sufficiently shaded.



“WE’LL REMEMBER THIS VINTAGE MORE FOR ITS EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY THAN FOR ITS GROWING CONDITIONS.” — JOHN KANE

The warm season ensured ripe sugars, so wine-makers timed harvest dates to bring other aspects of grape chemistry into optimal balance with Brix. Precision farming resulted in intense flavors in the grapes, with smaller berries yielding higher ratios of skins to juice in fermentation tanks.

“We’ll remember this vintage more for its exceptional quality than for its growing conditions,” Kane noted. “When you get fruit this good, you always want more of it.”

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## GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

The 2021 season highlighted California’s varied climate and geographic diversity. Typically, when the sun’s heat turns inland valleys hot and dry, natural thermodynamics pulls in cool, moist air from the Pacific Ocean. But that cold moisture must pass through gaps in the state’s coastal mountain range before it reaches inland vineyards. The largest of these portals include the Golden Gate, Monterey Bay and Templeton Gap in the Central Coast.

Fetzer Vineyards strongly benefited from all of these cooling engines in 2021, because many of its key growing regions are associated with them, particularly Arroyo Seco, Monterey and Paso Robles.

“We got plenty of great fruit from the coastal areas that were chilled by fog and wind,” says Clint Nelson, director of vineyard operations. “It’s ironic that this effect tends to work best when the rest of the state is hot and dry like it was in the North Coast, but that’s how the climate works in California, and we play the hand we’re dealt.”

## A UNIQUE SCHEDULE

Because of the wide divergence in ripening times between winegrowing regions that received natural cooling and those that did not, Fetzer Vineyards’ winemakers found themselves shifting away from a typical harvest schedule.



“IT WAS DEFINITELY NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL.” — MARGARET LEONARDI, WINEMAKER FOR THE FLAGSHIP FETZER BRAND

In most years, harvest begins with white grapes and ends with red — but not in 2021. The focus was on capturing the concentrated flavors in the grapes, no matter what color they were or when they came off the vine.

“We had Merlot and Riesling come in the same week, and Gewürztraminer at the same time as Cabernet Sauvignon,” recalled Margaret Leonardi, winemaker for the flagship Fetzer brand. “It was definitely not business as usual.”

Vines in sunny California typically develop sugars, acids and other critical elements of grape chemistry on a predictable schedule, providing winemakers

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THE UNUSUAL GRAPE CHEMISTRY PHENOMENON BECAME AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE EXCITING WINE.

with clear data and welcome flexibility regarding when they choose to pick. However, 2021 was different.

“The sugars came up quickly because of the warmth and small clusters, but acids were higher than the sugars would typically indicate,” explained Ben Byczynski, director of grower relations. “That made harvest decisions more complex for the entire team and required a collaborative effort to choose the right times to pick.”

Sebastian Donoso, winemaker for 1000 Stories and Fetzer Vineyards’ luxury portfolio, confirmed that picking decisions were more nuanced for this vintage.

“It wasn’t enough just to look at the chemistry data from lab reports. We had to taste intensely in the vineyards and add that personal component to every picking decision.”

## AN EXCITING VINTAGE

Although harvest 2021 began earlier than usual, it unfolded at a steady pace, allowing winemakers the flexibility to make thoughtful choices during crush and fermentation.

As a result, the unusual grape chemistry phenomenon became an opportunity to make exciting wine.

“Sauvignon Blanc is a great example,” said Jeff Cichocki, director of winemaking for Bonterra. “We got the ripe melon and tropical flavors that California Sauvignon Blanc is known for, and we also got grassy, peppery and mineral qualities that are more typical from the Southern Hemisphere. It’s an amazing year for flavor and complexity.”

The naturally abundant acids in the 2021 grapes complement the vintage’s ripe flavors, creating wines with vibrant aromas and flavors, and mouthwatering freshness on the palate. This is ideal for Fetzer, Bonterra and 1000 Stories brands, which aim for delicious wines crafted with early enjoyment in mind. Acidity is also a key to longevity, so collectible wines from Fetzer Vineyards’ California portfolio have the potential to age well and gain complexity with time.

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“REGENERATIVE FARMING HELPED THE VINES DELIVER FOR US IN 2021, AND IT WILL HELP THEM COME BACK HEALTHY AND READY FOR NEXT YEAR AS WELL.”  
— JOSEPH BRINKLEY, DIRECTOR OF REGENERATIVE FARMING

## A YEAR TO REMEMBER

The 2021 vintage is widely considered a year of exceptional quality among California vintners from throughout the state. For Fetzer Vineyards, the season also demonstrated the strength of its core values and strategies. One of those is distributed sourcing from prime growing areas, ranging from coastal overlooks to California’s vast Central Valley, and from rugged mountaintops in Mendocino to gentle plains in the southern Central Coast.

“When we say we’re a California winery, this is a big part of what we mean,” Kane noted. “Even in years of extreme weather, we’re able to grow and source with confidence because we draw fruit from so many excellent regions.”

Another core value is regenerative farming, which Fetzer Vineyards practices exclusively in its Mendocino County estate vineyards, where the 2021 growing season was especially challenging due to low water availability. According to Joseph Brinkley, director of regenerative farming, some vineyards were irrigated just four times during the season.

“Regenerative farming is a type of forward investing that builds resilience in the vineyards,” he explained. “That helped the vines deliver for us in 2021, and it will help them come back healthy and ready for next year as well.”