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EL DORADO WINE HARVEST IS ON; VINTNERS LOVING WHAT THEY TASTE

PLACERVILLE, CA – October 3, 2012 – It’s that magic time of year in the foothills of El Dorado County. The wineries and vineyards have begun their harvest and the air has the heady smells of green leaves, fresh-turned dirt and tons of just-crushed grapes.

And this year, winemakers and vineyard managers are cheering. The growing season has been near ideal in both length and temperatures, the fruit is ready to pick on schedule, and not only are the yields healthy, the grapes had plenty of time to grow and now have layers of intense flavors.

“Everything is looking great,” says Josh Bendick, co-winemaker at Holly’s Hill Vineyards. “After the last two years, we all learned a lot about dealing with rough weather, so this year should be a special one. I’m really excited about it.”

Wineries throughout the region – in Fairplay, in Pleasant Valley, in the Apple Hill/Camino area, and in the gentle foothills west of Placerville known as Greater El Dorado County – are all busy harvesting grapes off vines, hauling them to crush pads, loading them into crushers, and putting juice into fermentation tanks and barrels.

That’s why crush is such a great time to visit wine country. There’s so much to see and, of course, smell. Plus it’s an especially great time to visit the rolling hillsides of El Dorado County, where the sweeping views and the steep, undulating vineyards offer ringside seats to the harvest.

Right now, the vines are heavy with big, purple grape clusters. There’s a lushness of the still resilient summer, and the green vineyards are just starting to streak with the golds of fall. But those colors will come in a rush, and because of the high altitudes and brisk nights of El Dorado County, the leaves are headed for some of the brightest reds, golds and yellows in California wine country.

Crush will continue through October, and in some spots, even into early November. Vineyard workers are picking mostly whites now, though some reds are about ready to come in, too. Other reds, including many rows of cabernet, could still be on the vines for weeks.

But because of the unique hillsides of El Dorado County, where lots of vineyards are on steep and angled slopes, the ripening progress of the grapes often depends less on the varietals than on the location of vines

on a hill. Grapes tend to harvest from the hilltops down – because cold air sinks – and some vineyards can have a 10-degree difference in temperatures from top to bottom.

For visitors, that means that throughout the season, they can experience a variety of grapes being picked and crushed. And the mostly smaller wineries of El Dorado County are extremely accessible, so people can watch the entire harvest process anywhere they go, and often even get a taste of the just-made wines as they go into barrels.

The magic of crush and autumn in these foothills is so strong, it captivates locals just as much as it does visitors.

“I love walking through the vineyards in the evening, sometimes just with my dogs, sometimes with visitors along. We pull grapes and they’re so tasty and sweet,” said Alanna Taff, who owns Windwalker Winery and Vineyards with her husband, Jim. “I’ve been watching the beautiful sunsets and thinking that we’re so lucky to be in this wonderful countryside.”

About El Dorado Winery Association

El Dorado’s wineries beckon visitors with a wide diversity of award winning wines, friendly tasting room staffs, and idyllic views of hillside vineyards, snow-capped mountains and oak-studded foothills. They’re just an hour from Sacramento or South Lake Tahoe and a little over two hours from Reno or the San Francisco area.

Our wineries are renowned for making vibrant, distinct, delicious wines, grown in the dramatic elevations of the Sierra Nevada. For more information, visit www.edoradowines.org.

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