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**El Dorado Wineries Grow On Amidst Drought**

*Late winter rains and proactive water conservation spur growth and quality*

Placerville, CA—July 7, 2014 - Despite facing one of the most severe droughts on record in California, the El Dorado wine region is enjoying a fruitful start to the growing season and is expected to harvest another quality crop of grapes this year. Furthermore, local wineries are leading the way with proactive water conservation measures to ensure they and other grape-growing areas can cope with the ongoing drought.

**Storms Set Soil for Successful Growing Season**

After three consecutive years of below-normal rainfall and Governor Jerry Brown declaring a drought State of Emergency in January 2014, Californians welcomed the heavy snow and rainfall that hit the Golden State in early February and again in early March. Specifically, the Pacific moisture that washed over Northern California, including the Sierra foothills, drew cheers from El Dorado's more than 70 wineries, which form one of the state's most unique and popular viticulture regions.

"This past winter was another exceedingly dry one, raising concern about premature bud break and subsequent frost damage," said Kirk Taylor, an irrigation consultant in El Dorado County. "Many wineries were planning their first irrigation for January and February, which is earlier in the year than usual. The late winter rains filled up the root zones for grapes, providing adequate water for the vines and delaying that first irrigation."

Jonathan Lachs of Cedarville Vineyard believes El Dorado wineries will continue to produce the high-quality grapes they have become known for through the years. "Although grape quantity may decrease as wineries proactively drop (cut off) many of their grape clusters in order to conserve water, the quality of the remaining clusters should be quite good this year," he says.

**Wineries Prepare Vineyards to Consume Less Water**

The potential impact of drought varies substantially depending on each vineyard's location, soil, water source, and other factors. El Dorado wineries rely on one of two sources for their water supply: wells or the El Dorado Irrigation District. With this year's early rains, stakeholders are hoping both supplies remain in relatively good shape for 2014.

Still, for decades in El Dorado County, one of the first decisions wineries make before planting their vineyards is to select vines grafted onto drought-resistant rootstocks, in anticipation of inevitable low

rainfall years like these. While things remain steady for El Dorado grape growers this year, there is a long way to go in the season, so wineries have been preparing for ongoing water shortage.

Some have minimized weeds in order to reduce competition for available water and prevent them from competing with the vines, while others are amending their soils. Cedarville, for example, planted a nutrient-rich cover crop that is plowed into the ground “to help build a healthier soil profile, which I believe better retains moisture,” Lachs said.

Wineries are also adjusting their watering practices and using drip irrigation, which is more efficient than overhead watering. Taylor, who is helping several El Dorado wineries manage their irrigation strategies, points to system maintenance as another sound water conservation tactic. “No matter how efficient today’s systems are, it’s important to inspect for any major leaks that impact water delivery throughout the vineyards,” he said. “I also see more wineries evaluating water usage inside their production facilities and tasting rooms, then making adjustments to use less.”

### **Outlook Remains Good for this Year**

Following two strong years of production, which will keep wine supplies flowing for a while, the region is faring well. With more than 2,000 acres of vines, El Dorado County continues to produce some of California’s most sophisticated wines. The climate and soil are ideal for winemaking, with the warmer days and cooler nights favorably impacting the flavor of many varieties.

To mitigate the drought’s impact in future years, wineries continue to pay close attention to water supply and conservation measures. In fact, long before this most recent shortage, many have leveraged the county’s Irrigation Management Services (IMS), which provides area growers with suggested irrigation patterns specific to their geography and soil type.

Using a neutron probe once a week to determine soil moisture, along with weather information from the California Irrigation Management Information Service’s station in Camino, data is entered into the IMS irrigation scheduling prediction software, which calculates irrigation dates and duration.

Participating wineries receive this information in the weekly grower’s report via email, enabling them to make more informed decisions on their watering practices, while keeping grape and wine quality in mind.

“We all recognize that our water is extremely precious and we are facing a shortage, so we are planning for that across our entire operations, both in the vineyard and winery,” Lachs said. “As farmers, it’s important that we understand the situation and take the lead in water conservation, not only to demonstrate good stewardship, but to ensure the quality of El Dorado wines for years to come.”

#### *About El Dorado Winery Association*

**El Dorado’s wineries offer visitors a wide diversity of award winning wines, friendly tasting room staffs, and spectacular views of hillside vineyards, snow-capped mountains and oak-studded foothills. We’re in Gold Country 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.eldoradowines.org](http://www.eldoradowines.org).**