

# Food, Wine & Spirits



## Gossamer Cellars By Gary and Sue Grant

It's hard to believe that we have been writing this column for over 10 years. (*Oh, my gosh, you were just a baby when you started... I, of course, was too young to even consider drinking...*) Dream on Dear Wife! Anyway, I'm sitting at the computer trying to think of something we haven't talked about before. After all, ten years is a long time and we've covered a lot of ground.

But I got to thinking that over the last ten years we have acquired many new readers and some of you, like me, probably have some memory lapses and may have forgotten what you had for dinner last night let alone what you read 3,650 days ago. But then the light bulb above my head appeared and...viola!

The buzz word this year is DROUGHT! As most of you know, California has actually been in a 4-year drought. While many other thirstier crops have been withering, the hardier, somewhat drought tolerant grapevines have continued to flourish. However, they are not invincible. They can't flourish forever without some cooperation from Mother Nature.

The lack of water stresses the vines and for self-preservation they will eventually shut down and stop producing fruit (*sounds like a terrific time to stock up on your favorite vino no end time scenario here, just a word to the wise.*) Established vines have the advantage of deeper root systems and can burrow down farther into the soil to find water.

Younger vines are disadvantaged in that their root systems are much shallower and it becomes increasingly difficult for them to find precious water. Additionally, without rain to flush the soil regularly, salt and other chemicals from spraying

and fertilizing can build up and poison the vines. Warmer temperatures and droughts do have a short-term benefit. The grapes ripen faster resulting in earlier harvests. Sugar levels increase which in turn results in higher alcohol levels in the finished wine. Good news for high end wine producers that like a bigger, heavier, fruit forward wine with higher alcohol. Some would argue that during dry periods the wines have more flavors (*yummy, yummy!*).

Warmer, dryer years often translate into smaller crop loads in the vineyards. This works for the wineries because the fruit they get has all the qualities mentioned above and will make excellent wines, even if production is down.

The growers on the other hand, are dependent on volume. They are generally paid by the ton. Farming costs, at best, remain the same but lower tonnage means less income. Especially vulnerable are the small vineyards and producers. (*How many times must I state the obvious: Farming is the other "F" word?*)

Retail sales statistics indicate that consumption of high-end priced wines is up while the lower end priced wines is down. In Calaveras County, our local wine alliance, under a government grant, developed a vineyard irrigation tool designed to conserve water.

The tool provides a model that allows the grower to more judiciously manage the water usage in their vineyard. Still in the beta testing mode (*nothing sexier than nerd talk; right, Bill Gates?*) the goal is to make the model accessible to all vineyards.

Some viticulturists have indicated that water usage on grapevines can be reduced by as much as 40% and not stress out the plant to the point where it will shut down and stop producing. The challenge is with the public's perception of the vineyard. The picture of the serene, lush, green vineyard may need to take a back seat to the conservation of water.

The new norm may be a slightly stressed, dull green and brown, less than luscious looking vineyard with noticeably fe-

wer grape clusters dangling from the vines. (*So all you Ansel William types ought to get out there this weekend with your Nikons. Meanwhile, we have done our job as grape and wine seers to keep you informed and entertained. Remain calm and taste on!*)

Until next time, *Gary and Sue* Drop us a line and let us know what's on your mind... fromthevine@pacbell.net or PO Box 123, Sutter Creek, CA 95685

"What wine goes with Captain Crunch?"

*George Carlin*

**Editor's Note:** Happy 10th Anniversary with *The Gold Country Times!* What a gold nugget we found when Gary and Sue began writing their column for us!

## Imagination Theater to Host 8th Annual Fundraiser

It will be an Evening to Remember at Imagination Theater's 8th Annual fundraiser on Friday, August 14, from 7 to 10pm at the theater located on the El Dorado County Fairgrounds. There will be a live and silent auction during the evening as well as entertainment and a preview from the holiday musical, *Mary Poppins!*

Enjoy wines from the vines of El Dorado County as well as tasty fare from local caterers, Capital Sierra Catering and Diane Wilkinson. Many items have been donated by generous local businesses and individuals in the community.

Proceeds will allow the theater to continue to provide quality, live theater in the foothills. A peaceful evening and dinner at Sorensens, a weekend stay at the Inn on First in Napa, and an all-inclusive getaway to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, as well as wine tours, gift baskets, and season tickets are just a few of the items that await. IT is a 501(c)3 non-profit. Tickets online at: [www.imaginationtheater.net](http://www.imaginationtheater.net) or by calling (530) 642-0404.

**INVITE someone to Dinner and a Movie!**



## Cuisine du Terroir highlights Amador County Farms

### Farm tour and dinner showcase Amador County foods

Farms of Amador and the Amador Farmers Market present a farm dinner in on Saturday, August 22 at Helwig Winery. Before the dinner a self-guided Amador County farm tour highlights an ancient olive orchard, Amador Olive Oil, two local artist farms, Abbodanza and Mahoney's Poor Farm as well as two Amador County wineries, Terre Rouge & Helwig. The tour begins at noon. For dinner, Lucy's Spice Box has created an intricate, engaging menu with the theme of Cuisine du Terroir showcasing the ingredients of Amador County and its outlying areas in Provencal fashion. Upon arrival at 4pm guests will be welcomed with an array of hors d'oeuvres.

Live Latin jazz will accompany dinner and a lively auction and raffle will be offered with a variety of food, wine, and travel-focused items. At 5pm guests will be seated for a family style, all local and organic dinner in the Helwig pavilion. Tables are to be set with white linens and fresh cut flowers and offer sweeping, sunset views of the Shenandoah Valley.

The farm to fork dinner features a French inspired mixed grill, summer vegetables, Beef brisket, pork ribs & lamb sausage as well as Albacore Tuna Nicoise. Local grape grower and rancher Art Toy serve as the smoke master. Available to pair with the meal will be award-winning Helwig wines. A full menu is available at <http://Farmsofamador.com>

The Farm Tour includes a visit to Amador Olive Oil. Owner Susan Bragstad has been producing olive oil since 1995. Her farm has 370 trees. Next on the tour is Terre Rouge, Easton Winery for wine tasting on a lovely shaded outdoor terrace. For examples of small, sustainable farming, Daniel D'Agostini farms organically and biodynamically at Abbodanza in raised beds and in the ground. D'Agostini will share his photography studio and egg-laying chickens. In Plymouth the farm tour includes "Mahoney's Poor Farm", unique gardens and artisan woodshop belonging to Mike and Jenni Mahoney.

Tickets are \$70 each, \$60 for Farms of Amador members and available at [Farmsofamador.com](http://Farmsofamador.com) and at Amador Farmers Markets in Pine Grove, Sutter Creek, Jackson and Plymouth. 209-267-5506.

## "Supper Under The Stars" in Volcano

This August, food and wine enthusiasts will flock to the streets of Volcano for the culinary party of the year. On Sunday, August 2, Consolation Street in Volcano, is the site of the first annual "Supper Under the Stars", an entertainment and culinary extravaganza highlighting the local bounty and thriving community, that make up the pulse of Amador County. Over 200 attendees are expected to attend, all dressed in white, where they will dine at what will be the biggest dining table ever, on this side of the Mokelumne River. Guests will wine and dine, enjoying local farm fresh produce, local wines, local distilled spirits and local beer.


They will be entertained by local musical acts throughout the night. The evening culminates with a silent auction, and dancing with music, provided by local Big Band, *Mister Pinstripe*. Happy Hour and Appetizers at 5PM, Dinner at 6PM, Dancing at 7:30PM. The one-night event is designed to raise funds for The Amador Council of Tourism. Proceeds will benefit the community by allowing for increased promotion of Amador County. \$100 per person. Tickets: available at Amador Council of Tourism (209) 267-9249.

## FARM DINNER AT ROSEBUD'S CAFE

Chef has set the date for our next farm tour and supper, Saturday, August 15th. The farm will be open for tours and visitors from 3 to 5pm. Seating for supper will begin at 6pm. This will be a three-course dinner featuring our farm-raised lamb. The event is by reservation only; seating is limited. Please call at 209-257-0227.

# WAFFLE SHOP

## Waffle Bonanza!

**\$4.99** Waffle, 1 egg 

**Choice of 2 Bacon or 2 Sausage**

*No Subs, 1 per Customer*

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