



ARGYLE WINERY

2006 Vintage for North Willamette Valley by Rollin Soles, Argyle Winemaker

This was a very comfortable vintage with very little drama. What I call a "California Harvest"!!

Spring brought plenty of sunshine and heat to set an extraordinarily large crop. This is quite a contrast to 2004 and 2005 poor fruit set vintages. We even experienced a few record-breaking days of heat in June and July. The Willamette Valley almost set a summer record for number of days over 90F (32.2C) at 21 days. 2006 had the third highest heat units since 1983. Interestingly, the top 5 heat summations include three years in this new millennium. Has our transition into the "New Millennium" led to warmer summers?

The greatest challenge to making extraordinary wine this year was to correctly estimate crop yield, then to accurately execute the crop thinning. Many vineyards were as much as 40% above their estimated yields!

Seldom have we seen larger cluster weights. A contest here at my winery gave a record Pinot Noir cluster weight of 243g (normal range is 80 – 100 grams per cluster). Disease posed little issue throughout the season.

September brought us a bit of a scare with a week of precipitation accumulation of about 0.6 inches and cool temperatures. The long-range weather report of 18 September predicted a somewhat drastic collapse in sunny weather. The report of 19 and 20 September completely backed off the rain. The following week saw temperatures in the mid 80's F (30C), with a very desiccating east wind.

The lesson learned from the somewhat similar 2003 vintage was to wait out the warm dry spell. Those with irrigation could ride out the leaf drying effects of this desert wind from Eastern Washington State.

At Argyle, we doubled up on the irrigation amounts to a still tiny 2 gallons/vine. The longer the vine remained healthy, the richer the flavors produced as vintage was delayed into October. Often grapes harvested at the end of the growing season are the most exciting in terms of fruit expression and structure.

A most glorious "Indian summer" ensued throughout the Northwest USA. Wineries and vineyards were able to spread their operations into a smooth steady pace without the usual threat of inclement weather.

Sparkling fruit picked during the cool week with some precipitation has bright fruit and high natural acidity. The table wine chardonnay is balanced and has fruit expression of melon and pear. Pinot Noir red wine fruit has lively red as well as black fruit with surprising structure. I believe that our lack of hesitation with use of irrigation helped significantly to allow the vines to deliver brighter fruit to the grapes than our efforts in 2003. It pays to learn from our past!