

BAY AREA

Changing climate speeds up Napa Valley harvest season

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NAPA VALLEY, Calif. (KRON) — Harvest season is in full swing in Napa Valley, but due to some extreme weather forecasts, the season started earlier than usual.

The harvest season began in early September and is expected to wrap up by mid-October for most wineries. At Baldacci Family Vineyards, everything is grown, hand-picked, processed and bottled on-site.

"We're in complete control from grape all the way to glass. Some people say we're control freaks, but we like the qualitative control," said Michael Baldacci. Baldacci has been the head winemaker at his family's vineyard in the Stags Leap District of Napa Valley for the last decade.

"I don't think I'd find the same joy if I wasn't doing it for my family growing grapes and tending to the vineyards. It's fun because I'm doing it for my family," Baldacci said.

In the last couple of years, mother nature has thrown a few curveballs their way, such as the complex fires of 2020. "2020 we actually didn't even make wine because of the smoke that was in the air," said Baldacci.

This year, a multi-day triple-digit heatwave followed by rain forced the harvest process to speed up. Baldacci said they are quickly adjusting to the new normal.

"With the changing climate, we're seeing it. We're picking in September. We'll be done early part of October," said Baldacci.

"We are seeing a little bit more dramatic highs and lows," said Josh Widamen, President of Stags Leap District Winegrowers Association. He said they are all working on ways to adjust.

"As growers, we need to continue to find ways to handle a little bit more drastic weather situations," said Widamen.

As hot weather gets even hotter, shade cloths placed on the grapes help with the harsh sunlight.

"This year, we used a lot more shade cloths. I was a little bit worried, but it withstood this spell really nicely," said Baldacci.

Once the picking began, the grapes go in half-ton bins before being poured into the machine for processing where the machine helps weed out any duds.

"Plenty of juice in there. Ones that are complete raisins, we don't want that making the wine," said Baldacci.

When all is said and done, Baldacci Vineyards will have made about 120,000 bottles of their 2022 Cabernet. "It is a challenging year, but the wines are going to be amazing," added Baldacci.

