

FOOD // WINE, BEER & SPIRITS

One thing the California storms are good for: vineyards



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California is weathering another wet, stormy week. Many communities across the state are struggling with severe flooding. At least 17 people have died. And the rain is far from over: [Another series of atmospheric rivers](#) is expected to hit before early next week.

Given the widespread devastation, it's hard to spin these storms as anything other than bad news. And yet, for one sector of California, these storms have been almost uniformly good news. I'm talking about vineyards.

"We are delighted to get this rain," said Claire Ramey of Healdsburg's Ramey Wine Cellars. "We'll take as much rain as we can get."

This is the best time of year for rain for vineyards. Grape vines are dormant during the winter. These months represent the plants' moment to recharge between the fall's harvest and the spring's budbreak — which signals the start of the year's growing season. A wet winter is ideal for vines, replenishing the soils and filling up wells that will be used for irrigation later in the year. This burst of rain is a welcome reprieve from the [dry, drought-ridden winters](#) of recent memory.

Of course, there could theoretically be a point of *too* much rain. Winegrowers' big worry during a major storm is erosion. But no one I spoke to reported any erosion issues so far. "It seems to be the big drink we've been looking for, without any of the bad effects," said Michael Baldacci, director of winemaking and vineyards at Baldacci Family Vineyards in Napa.

In vineyards around the Russian River, in [Sonoma County](#), there has been some flooding — but again, submersion in water at this time of year is not necessarily detrimental. Ramey Wine Cellars' estate vineyard flooded on Monday night — vine tips could be seen poking out of a big, murky lake of water — but had receded by the following morning.

"I've worked out here for 12 years and I've never seen a storm cause this much damage and runoff," said Molly Lonborg, winemaker at [Alta Colina Vineyard & Winery](#), which is located on the road in question.

Las Tablas Creek, which runs underneath Adelaida Road, essentially exploded the road in two separate places. "The road completely gave way and is just a gaping hole to the culvert," said Lonborg. It forced several wineries in the area to close down this week, both for visitors and for their own employees.

One of the road disruptions is right by the entrance to [Tablas Creek Vineyard](#), a popular tourist destination. Owner Jason Haas said he doesn't know when they'll be able to reopen. There's an alternative route that people can take to reach Tablas Creek, but he isn't sure whether that path is passable yet.

Claire Ramey was unconcerned. She suspects flooding may actually have some advantages for her vineyard. Part of the Ramey vineyard has phylloxera — a louse that can kill grape vines — and a flood is known to diminish the pest's population. She even thinks there may be some fresh biomaterial deposited during a flood, strengthening the soil. (That fresh biomaterial may also come with some debris: During a [2019 flood](#), a door was deposited among the Ramey vines.)

But grape vines are only one element of the California wine industry. And the storms have not been as kind to one crucial piece of infrastructure: roads. That's especially true in Paso Robles' [Adelaida District](#), where an overflowing creek on Monday cracked open a crucial thoroughfare.