

Dear Honorable Legislators,

Who would have believed that we would have a smoke taint problem in the Willamette Valley. Actually I wasn't surprised since there have been past fire seasons where Oregon as a state had more forest fires than California, Washington, or British Columbia. It was only a matter of time before it would happen to our Willamette Valley Wine Industry. We came close to it being a problem in 2017 when ash fell over the valley from the Gorge fires, but we were lucky. Not so lucky in the fall of 2020. And so I have to think state wide versus just the WV. Climate Change is a reality for all of Oregon and not something happening somewhere else. We purchase fruit from the Rogue, Umpqua, and Willamette Valley AVAs as well as have our own 36 acres on the west slope of the Eola Hills. In the fall of 2020 as the fires began and smoke started coming into the valley, I felt that no matter what, I owed our growers the respect to purchase their fruit that they spent the whole season growing. I could not say at the last minute, "Sorry, smoke taint, can't take your crop." I think you are aware of the issue most recently where \$4 million worth of Southern Oregon fruit was rejected on a whim by an infamous winery in California. We are all in this together. A lot happened within our various Wine Grower organizations. There were many zoom meetings about smoke taint alongside meetings about dealing with Covid-19. Many of us reached out to our CA and WA neighbors to learn of their experiences. Heck, we even reached out to researchers in Australia. A number of mitigation procedures and ideas were discussed. They could only advise us but really had no decent resolution other than most importantly, analyze and decide from there. Make the best you can, but know what you are dealing with. No matter what, if the grapes were tainted, they would be worth much less and in many cases not marketable. We were fortunate in that we had only one vineyard on the East facing slope in the Salem West Hills that had a serious smoke taint issue. The east facing slope of the Eola Hills just north of Salem had a direct hit from the smoke coming out of the Cascades and any red grapes coming from that AVA were affected severely by smoke taint. A lot of red wine WAS NOT made because of this. I also made wine from vineyards that were rejected out of smoke taint fear, but we brought it in and made wine with the caveat that based on analysis, we would discuss the value of the crop. Most of us were totally in the dark as to what to do with smoke tainted grapes. Many of us sent samples off to various labs around the country to try and figure out how bad the situation was. With timely data, we could tell a grower to pick and we could at least make something out of the fruit. Most growers did not have crop insurance and we all learned that crop insurance had to be purchased in November of the year before the year of harvest. You can imagine being that grower and hearing that after you grew and picked the crop, a winery had rejected your fruit out of hand, and the insurance company said, "Sorry, if you had not picked it, and you did have insurance that you purchased last November, we could cover you. But since you picked it, sorry, you are out of luck." The upshot of my story here is that even though the technology exists to analyze for smoke taint, we could not make timely decisions. The few labs that exist that have the capability were backed up for 6 weeks. Too late to make picking decisions. We knew we had to make decisions quickly or the crop would be totally lost. And we had to know what to do with the mitigation techniques that were available. We urgently need the funding for a lab at OSU that even if we have to pay for analysis, at least we would have data that would tell us what to do in a timely manner. I urge you to support this funding needed by our industry.

Respectfully,

Rob Stuart

Owner and Winemaker

RStuart&Co Winery