

The Long and winding road | Posted October 2023

Well, our 5th and final harvest is done. Little did we know when we woke up that Saturday September morning, that indeed this day would not be the final harvest day for us. The team was loading grapes into bins and onto flat beds, as I was loading up the final things into the U-Haul. It was a crazy morning as the team unfurled across the vineyard. It was a beautiful morning, and families came out with their children. It was such a joyful way for us to complete our cycle of growing. The team loaded up what could safely be carried to [the Gorge](#), while we loaded up what we could safely take in the U-Haul. But we both realized that neither had planned well enough and some things had to be left behind. The team ran out of load capacity, so we were unable to get the final 5 rows of grapes picked and loaded. The remaining grapes would wait to be picked until the following week. The Keller family came to the rescue for us and took a table we couldn't fit, as well as my car. The transport team said they could get to St Louis faster than we could, so we opted to have my car picked up a few days after we left, to try and time the arrival simultaneously.





Driving from Salem, OR to St. Louis, MO was not a quick or simple task. The hitch wasn't placed correctly, our cargo weight was maxed, so driving an electric vehicle over multiple passes, made for a long, arduous journey. We rarely went over 63 mph. We were getting intermittent texts about final details of the farm sale which only made the drive more angst provoking, as usually there was no signal to return these inquiries. On the road, in the middle of Wyoming, with cross winds at 40-60 mph, and grapes left on the vine and pending rain at the farm, we started questioning if should reconsider our timeline. Then you add inclement weather, fatigue, stress — let's just say after 8-9 hours a day in the car, we were each happy to take our cargo up to the room and rest. We persisted in our plan, knowing that we had to meet the POD and my car



One redeeming thing about the journey was being able to reconnect with old friends along the way...



We stopped in Boise and saw our friends the Brandts. They have certainly had some big changes in their lives since leaving Bend and becoming grandparents. This was Rod's second time to stop at the Shanleys in Colorado Springs while making a cross-country journey. Daddy Sean hooked us up with a better hitch, making the rest of the drive feel much more secure. We were able to get a day's "rest" with them, while hiking the INCLINE. If you know, you know. Then back on the road to continue adding states to the puzzle.





Arriving at St. Louis, we had to then worry about the row of cars blocking our no parking signs. We were required to obtain a permit to park the POD on the street to unload it, which we did. Unfortunately, not all of neighbors felt obligated to obey the signs. Luckily at the last minute, a kind person showed up and we moved to our planned spot. Also, we had a kind patient POD driver, who used to tow cars for the city, who patiently waited while we figure out the load space. Watching that container shift and rock as it was taken off the truck, well, you can imagine, the stomach queasiness was not remedied. Luckily, our movers were timely and helpful, helping us unload the trailer and the container. We live on the 4th floor, and there is only one elevator, so more arms and legs to transport were welcomed. My car arrival was 3 days late, which was 12 hours before I was to leave for Knoxville. The POD departure was 24 hours late, which was 24 hours past our permit. The city employee, however, kindly reassured, me not to worry





Despite some bumps, which were to be expected, it is all we imagined and more. We can walk almost everywhere: church, post office, library, groceries. There is a direct route to a large park that is right in the middle of town. It has a paved bike/jog path all around it. The zoo, art museum, golf course and skating rink are all located within the park. The homily at the Basilica that first Sunday reminded us to [have no anxiety and make all requests known to GOD](#), as well as the [parable of the Tenants](#). We attempted to be good tenants of our vineyard. We are thankful for the many lessons we often were forced to learn about ourselves and the land while on the journey at Aeolus Vineyards. Farm life offered us solitude and quiet for the past years, especially during the chaos of the Covid-19 pandemic. The bustle of the city seems a welcome change from the isolation.





Soon after our arrival, there was a family emergency for Rod. Recall, one of the key reasons for our relocation, to be closer to our aging parents, proved itself not 24 hours after our arrival. We unpacked enough to make it livable, and he was quickly back on the road, without the U-Haul trailer, to go see what needed to be done to help his family.





We are fortunate that we were able to live out one of our shared dreams. Now we will move forward down this next road. Returning to the Midwest in the fall, reminds us that there are seasons, [a time to plant and a time to harvest](#). These seasons can bring joy and happiness if you take the time to stop and look around. ***“So, I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God”.*** Ecc 3:12

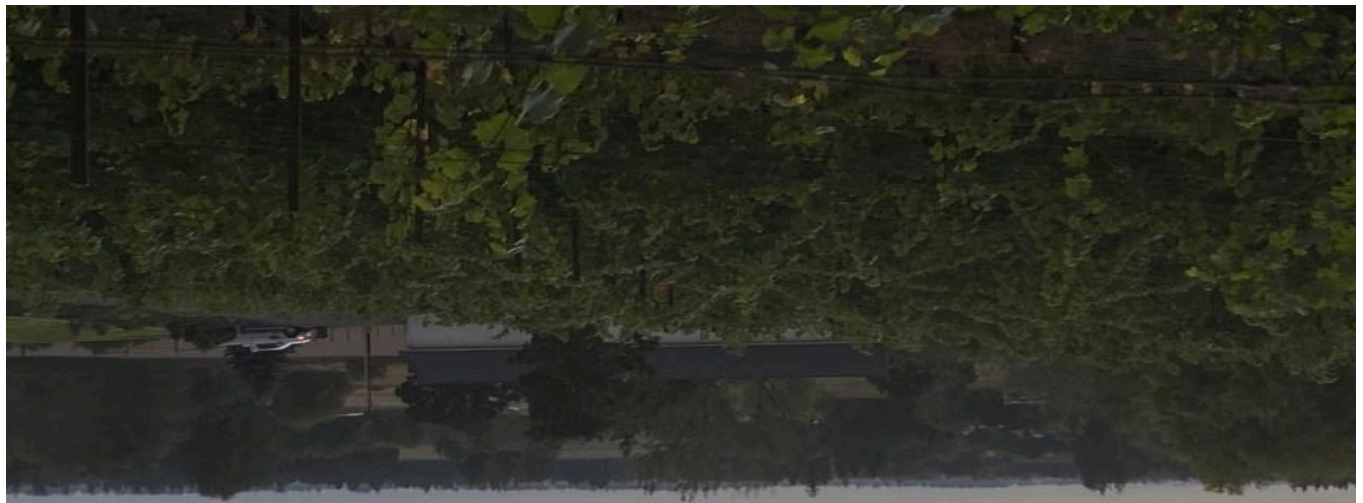
Author: R. Elliott Mullens

Posted: October 22, 2023

Final Harvest? | Posted September 2023



The calm and peace before, Things we will miss when we leave.
It's that time of the year again. Leaves and temperatures are falling, and currently so is the rain. It is a bit early for rain, as usually happens in late October, but we find ourselves in another atmospheric river here in the valley. Rain is not uncommon here in the Willamette Valley, but when you have grapes still to harvest can be a potential hazard. It should be over by this weekend, and the remainder of the grapes will be off to the GORGE.





Temperatures drop and rain falls.



and it's fall y'all!

Luckily, a few weeks ago, however, we did harvest all of the Pinot Noir. It took two trips for the team from [Arguelles Vineyard Management](#) and [Landmass Wines](#), as there was such a great amount of grapes.



Set-up for Success!



Bins ready for action.



The team came early and ready to go. The decision to change management teams has brought fruit on so many levels. We have a team that we are collaborating and communicating with on a regular basis, bringing health and sustainability to not only the crop but the land as well. We have seen our labor over these past 5 seasons result in not only higher yields, but healthier grounds and plants.





The pumpkins were harvested early, so that our friends and neighbors could enjoy them as fall decorations. The dahlias and zinnias continue to produce color and bring joy to the cooler days. The hummingbirds that will make the journey down south are frantically preparing. But, recall, the amazing thing about the valley, is there is a species of hummers that remains through the winter. It scared us last year, but then we did some [research](#) and bought a feeder that has a heat lamp. I will miss my little friends, but where now we will be in the path of the monarchs.



We will miss the peace and calm this land has brought to us. Owning a vineyard was always a dream. I think it goes back to seeing movies, visiting France and Italy. We are fortunate that we both had the same dream and desire. Our friends back in Texas will recall the many coffee table books about Tuscany, Pinot, Wine Regions they gave to us over the years, as well as the multiple wine dinners at Myron's learning about the many types of grapes and wine growing regions around the world. Living on a vineyard has been like most trials along this journey, you only recognize the blessings once you overcome the tribulations.



Reflecting on our time in Oregon, we were blessed to meet so many wonderful, loving, accepting people who we now call friends. We were able to ski, bike, hike, paddle and drink in all that this amazing state has to offer. As we learned from our camino, the roads may be bumpy and often seem off course, but trusting and relying on each other, together we will reach the final destination



and off she goes...It
was tricky to
maneuver three lives
into boxes



Author: R. Elliott Mullens

Posted: September 26, 2023

Tags" Eola Amity Hills ava, hummingbirds, landmass wines, pinot noir, tempranillo



Color of Grapes not only thing changing here | Posted August 19, 2023

Well, it is time we made a formal announcement. We have decided to put the farm on the market and leave Oregon. We have so enjoyed all that this great state has given us over the past years. It is amazing to think how young Lauren was when we moved to Bend, OR back in 2010. Danette has decided to step away from medicine for a while. This was a planned event at her 55th birthday, due to COVID -19 pandemic and the shortage of medical staff locally, she decided to stay on at Kaiser Permanente. Rod has accepted a position at the Veterans Medical Center in St. Louis, MO. It will be an opportunity with teaching and a team, back to his roots. The move will put us closer to our parents who are aging and closer to Tennessee.



The Property from the Back Side



The Barn Apartment



Our home

We have enjoyed the opportunity to go back to Rod's roots of farming. We know we have an amazing vineyard management team who hopes to continue to participate with the future buyers in continuing to practice using safe and sustainable methods while bringing excellent viable fruit to market. We anticipate another great crop this harvest, but we have learned to allow the process to happen and until those grapes go onto the scale, they cannot be counted. Please check out the [amazing drone video](#) our realtor had created to market the property.



Still Changing – Notice the Variation
Pinot Noir fruit with similar berries



Needing to hide



Don't want sunburn

The grapes are almost done with the process, veraison. This is when the green berries start to ripen and take on the beautiful purple hues, we all recognize in wine grapes. The sugar content now increases, which brings the potential of even more predators than the deer we already felt we had conquered earlier this spring. Now smaller, less obvious invaders can become quite the threat to allowing maturation of the fruit. The hotter and dryer it becomes, as we go through our natural summer

cycle, bees, wasps and other stinging insects can actually poke small holes in the fruit, which can be undetectable initially.

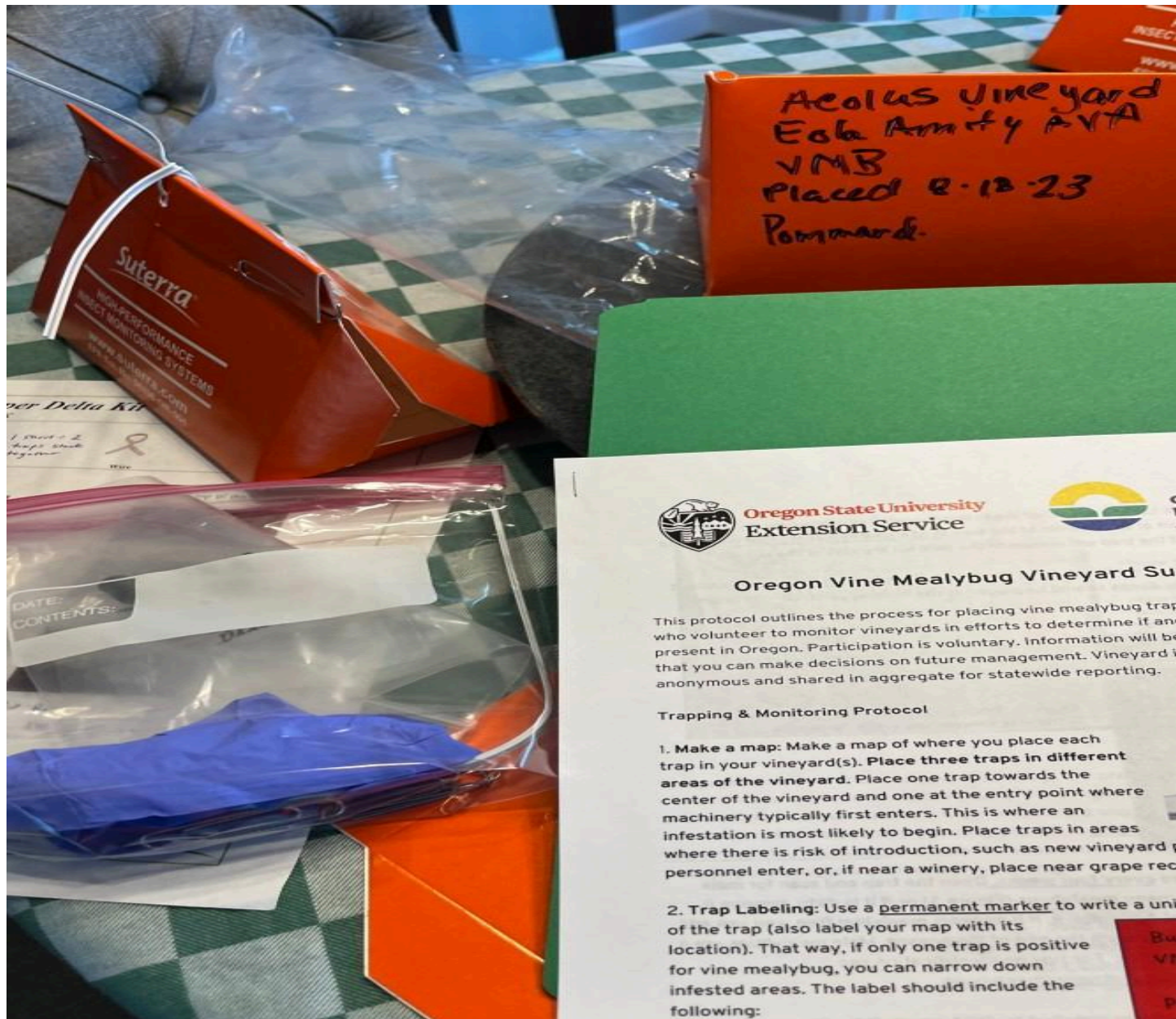
Other even smaller adversaries are things like fungus, bacteria and smaller insects. While the vineyard management team has prolonged their normal spray program, based on findings on other surrounding farms, there is always still the possibility of losing the crop. We continue to practice using a [LIVE certified model](#), without the certification, which supports environmentally and socially responsible wine growing. Recall, we started to go through the official process during the COVID -19 Pandemic and we didn't find that it was going to be cost effective for us to join.



We also agreed to participate in a Mealy Bug Survey. We put the traps out in the vineyard. We will collect data to send back to OSU extension office in 4 weeks. We do not plan to find evidence of this insect, but as there has been some noted in the Oregon wine country, there is vigilance as to its increasing presence as they too

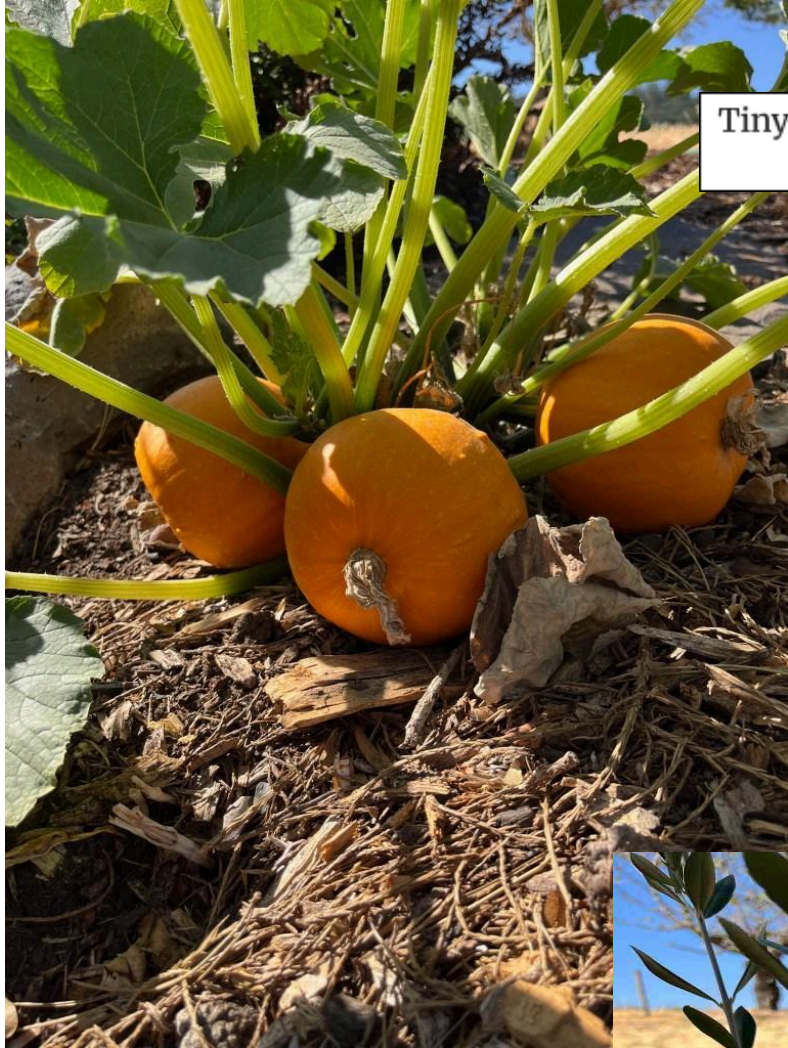
can cause damage. The [team who know a lot more about grape growing](#) than us has created small kits that will be reviewed and collected for evidence of the pest.





The Directions

The rest of the farm has so many other things that continue to grow and bring joy to us. This will be our second season with a substantial pumpkin harvest. We have several varieties of seeds that were left from last year's harvest that our friend was kind enough to start in her greenhouse earlier this spring. Our dahlias didn't make quite the comeback as in previous years. This year we collected and stored, as closely as we thought the directions said. Unfortunately, many were lost to mold, as obviously not put in quite dry enough environment. Many don't pull the tubers, and we hadn't in years past. We wouldn't pull them again, if we were staying here.



Tiny warty pumpkins

Olive Tree with Olives



White pumpkins which should grow

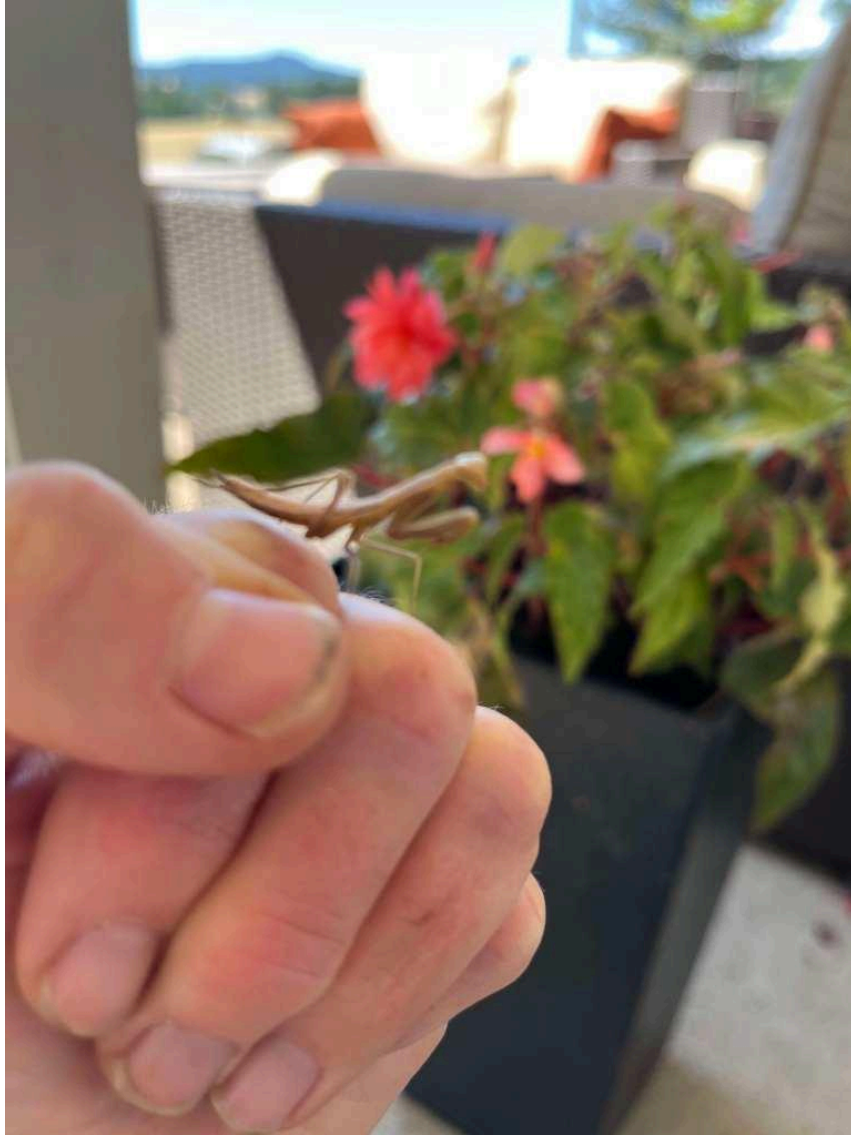


Dahlias that survived the winter



Cinderella Pumpkin

But we are not staying, we are preparing to move back to the Midwest. Where it all started. Getting back to the central time zone will simplify a lot of processes. We will miss the cool 56-degree August mornings, waterfall hikes in the winter and most of all the friends we have made over our time here. We don't plan to leave until most of the fruit is harvested. Please come and see us, before we leave. There is plenty of room here or at the [Barn Office](#). Meanwhile, stay safe, cool, hydrated and remember to look for joy in every tiny thing. It is out there, if you stop and slow down and acknowledge it.



Cheers for now. We hope to see you out in the field for our last harvest while living here. Rod and Danette

Author: R. Elliott Mullens
Posted on August 19, 2023



Tenacity proves me wrong | Posted July 19, 2023

The fruit continually teaches me lessons in perseverance. Earlier this season, I had worried that there was significant damage from the local animals, but once again, the tenacious plants have proven their resilience. This block that I had taken under my wing, was damaged by deer. These past years, I have diligently worked to fertilize and prune them personally. That is likely why when I saw that initial damage I was so broken hearted. How quickly one forgets, when they are enveloped in the moment of gloom and doom, of what these plants have survived. Last year, when there was the late frost and snow right before bloom and concern that there would be no fruit, the plants proved the predictions wrong with a banner harvest across the valley.



End of the heat wave rain 2020



2021 Ice storm

In 2021, when there was a 1000th year weather event, designated as a heat dome over the Pacific Northwest with temperatures above 110 degrees, the grapes still came. Now walking along this block, we have deemed as the LaLa Block, I see these plants with fruit sets as big as ever. These plants thrive on surviving and overcoming. Even now they are continuing to flower to work to make more fruit. I am even dropping fruit, cutting off excess fruit, to lighten the load for larger clusters to mature more efficiently.

This past week, I have been hedging and leafing this block. Hedging allows for better control of the canopy, but also creates a more uniform row, in case the nets need to be placed to protect the fruit from birds. The longer the fruit stays on the vine to ripen the more susceptible it is to birds and other pests. Leaf removal may improve fruit quality but decreases the probability of fruit rot. It also aids in fruit ripening as the fruit is more exposed to the sun. Thinning the leaves too much, however, creates a possibility of fruit damage due too much sun exposure. The amount of leaf removal is challenging, as depending on how long the summer heat lasts, affects how ripe the grapes can get.

The grapes need to have a certain sugar level to make specific wines. More sun exposure allows quicker ripening, as one can't predict when the fall rains will come. Remember, last year the rains started on the date of our final harvest. The constant balance of sun and rain is not something a farmer has control over, so the removal of the leaves is a way to manipulate the sun exposure.



Shoots reaching for the sun



Pinot Noir with
consistent fruit set



Bloom is done

The plants remind me of the parable about a man planting seed during WWII, he was asked why he kept planting even though it seemed they would not be around to harvest, “sowing seeds in a battle because you must have faith and hope, the battle will end, and you will be there for the harvest”. I should know that these plants have been here for decades and have overcome many hardships. They long to create fruit for the harvest. That is the delight of wine grapes, the harder their battle to make fruit, the better the juice they produce. I stand out there with them now and smile, wondering how long it will take me to appreciate that the vines will generally overcome most obstacles, usually with a lot more grace than me. I long to be like the vines, to continue to grow and persevere while reaching for the sun above, and not succumb to life’s minor obstacles.

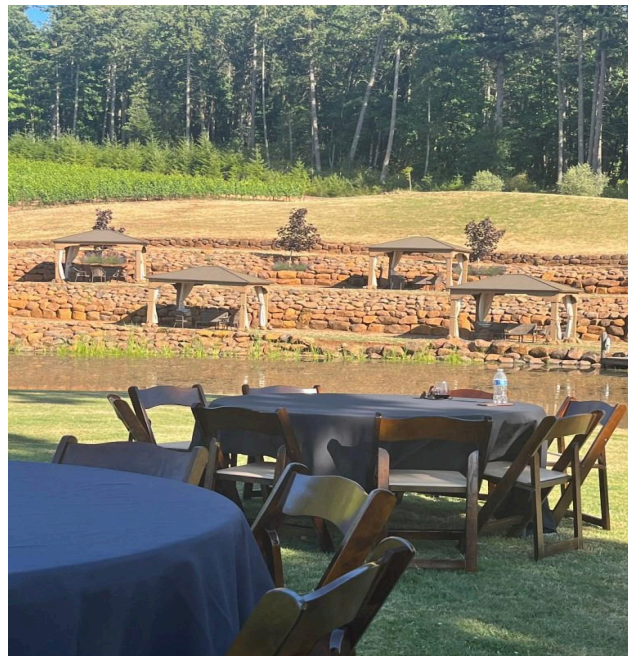


Bird netting repurposed



Tempranillo set

As we allow the grapes sugar content increase and enjoy the warmth of the summer sun, the Valley has come alive even after the hiatus that the COVID- 19 pandemic placed over the area these past summers. The community is thriving in opportunities for fun and enjoyment. We recently visited [Lady Hill Winery](#) and watched the [Lark Opera](#) perform a flight of Opera. [Redgate](#) Winery continues to have live music weekly, as well as many other wineries across the valley. [The Eola Amity AVA](#) Winegrowers group had their annual summer celebration at [Eola Hills Legacy Estate](#). I had the pleasure of coordinating the event. I had led the way on the winter holiday celebration, so it seemed like a natural progression. The events are truly seamless, with the settings of amazing grounds thanks to the wineries. The weather was perfect, bull frogs singing in unison as we shared our favorite local wines and talked shop. The Van Duzer winds started on cue just as the event was ending. The site hosts live concert events regularly, as well as [yoga](#).





Canopy growing up.



Barn Office



I encourage you to connect with [Salem Stays](#) and come and visit the area. the stays at the [Barn Office](#) have certainly picked up as the weather has warmed up. We anticipate harvest late September, early October based on bloom. Veraison won't be for several more weeks, so once that happens, we should have better estimates of harvest dates. CHEERS!

No matter what is going on around you
Never give up"

— Dalai Lama XIV

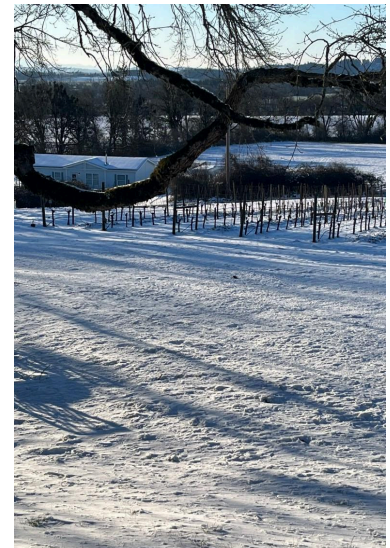
Another gorgeous day

Author: R. Elliott Mullens
Posted on July 19, 2023

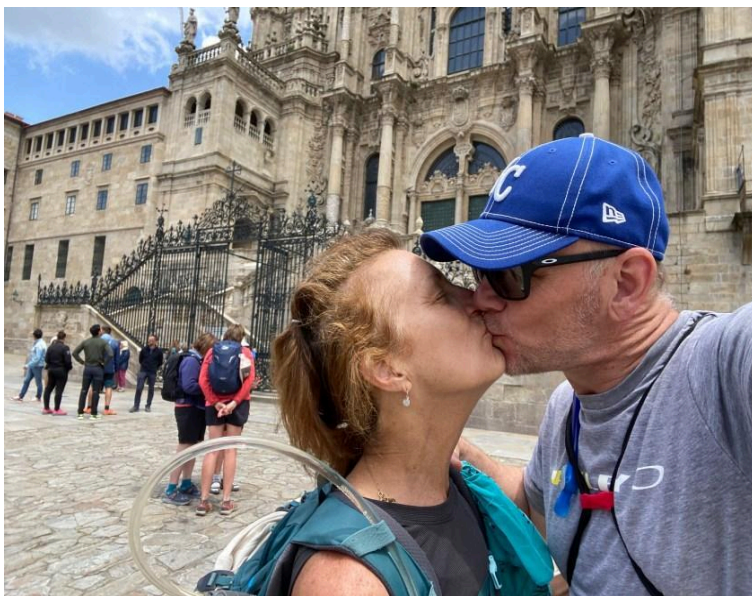


5th Growing Season, already? | Posted June 15, 2023

Well, those vines are back at it. A typical cold, dark, wet winter here in the Willamette Valley ended on time this year, right around Memorial Day. We decided this was the year to take advantage of the minimal things to do around the farm in spring, so we headed east. We took a pilgrimage to the Iberian Peninsula and hiked the Coastal Camino from Portugal to Spain. Prior to our departure, the vines had been fertilized and pruned with minimal bud break throughout the vineyard, so we thought we had time to spare. And yet one more winter with some reasonable snow days out here in the foothills of the Eola-Amity Hills.



The trip was an amazing time of reflection and recognition. Acknowledging what we truly are capable of physically while walking 5-7 hours a day, while simultaneously reflecting on your achievements and failures over the past decades. These past 4 years have been tough. There have been personal highs and lows for both of us. While the farm has been an opportunity for growth and learning, it has been a source of frustration and disappointment. Certainly, our careers over the course of the pandemic had several unfortunate disappointments, but there were moments of reprieve which were viewed as small victories. I would like to think we came back stronger and more optimistic for the future. We both recognize that we deserve to be in places where we can be our best selves, both personally and professionally.



Soon after our return, bloom started happening across the vines. What also was apparent was the change in migration of the deer families. We have always had some interruption of the vine growth due to deer and their young. We thought, however, that we had started seeing less damage from them over the past years, so at the end of season last year we elected to completely remove the final pieces of some fencing. Upon our return home, I recognized that the deer had decided to return. I had tried in vain already with Irish Spring Blocks tied to posts in the past with minimal success. I had read about a smelly concoction which they would find offensive, hopefully more so than the soap which was not altering the travel patterns. I made brew of cinnamon, garlic and chili powder and soaked rags in it. There are multiple old wife's tales about different smells which they find offending. I tied these clothes all around the East Block, the block that the barn office overlooks. Within days of our return, despite my efforts, the deer had completely devastated the East bloc of the vineyard. We made a tough decision immediately with our vineyard management team to continue minimal maintenance and expect no harvest from this part of the vineyard. We took the components of the former fence and created barriers over on the remaining Pinot Noir. This seems to be working thus far. Also, continued growth of these vines which were not initially damaged, allows for further protection of the fruit.







Our friends across the street informed us that another neighbor had noted that he had killed 30 coyote this season. I have a feeling this action has drastically altered the ecosystem. We used to hear the howls of the coyotes at night, and we noticed, that has not happened yet this spring. I had built a deer fence around my garden of peppers and tomatoes, non-deer options, but as you can see from the tops, that didn't keep them from trying. I have since continued to add to this fortress to remind them, not only that they are not welcome, but these are not even things they like to eat.





As we move into the dry hot season, potential for growth and change is all around us. What we learned from the Camino, is trust that you will be provided for. Just continue to get up each day, put one foot in front of the other and continue the journey with your head up, smiling and singing. This is what allows you to find the joy in today. If you find joy, you can then pass it on to those you meet along the way. That is the purpose of the journey, sharing your joy, helping others to make the journey, appreciating that we don't all get to the destination we expected. Like the vines, ever reaching and ever growing, knowing the long cold winters are what bring the best fruit.



What a harvest!!!! | Posted June 15, 2023

Wow, that was a great harvest year for us at Aeolus Vineyards. We had the largest harvest on our records. Some of those records are thin but 17.5 tons of grapes total is a great year!!!



Recovering buds from the recent cold spell late April 2022.

Of course, with all the crazy spring weather in 2022, ice, snow, rain etc. we were worried about the overall crop and if we had too much damage. Well, we were proved wrong, probably helped by Mother Nature with the significant rain that continued through April and May then cool weather into June. This delayed the overall bloom and subsequent harvest but gave the plants lots of time to recover from the severe cold snap.



Since we could not do much to the vineyard but wait and watch it all grow, we tried to keep busy. Multiple hikes scattered through our working days and a quick week off allowed us to surprise our friends during a cruise to Alaska.

Glacier Bay, Alaska 2022



We had a wonderful surprise and met Khaki and Chip Lano in Bend where they were doing a tour for Chip's birthday. We then met them for dinner on Saturday night and literally closed the city that evening. Not even sure how the 2 of them were still up considering the 30-mile bike ride the day before, hiking Misery Ridge at Monkey Face then staying out all hours with us. WHAT A BLAST!!!!!!

Finally harvest came starting in September. COVID delayed the harvest a little for our buyers, but the fruit was gorgeous and HUGE!!! And of course we had help from Danette's dad, Bill.

Pouring some refreshments





5.8 oz beasts
harvested that day.
usual weight is 3.5 to
4 oz per cluster

My colleague David Panossian shared some of his harvest with us, Rhubarb and fresh tomatoes that we promptly made these two beautiful and wonderful pies. Rhubarb is my new favorite for sure.



Author: R. Elliott Mullens
Posted on June 15, 2023



Dog Days of Summer? | Posted August 7, 2022.

It is now. We are finally having the warm days of summer and no forest fires in the area yet. But as you can see below, a few unexpected weather events happened before August.



Week of April 11, 2022



Mother Nature continues to throw curve balls at our attempts to be farmers. This year the growing season started with a late winter/early spring frost in our area. There was initial concern that up to 50% of the crop might be lost, as the untimely cold spell came right at bud break.

Unheard of late snow in the Valley

A grape bud is comprised of three smaller sections, known as the primary, secondary, and tertiary.

The primary bud, which was present on most of our plants at the time of the extreme temperatures, contains the shoot with the flower that eventually develops into the grapes.

The buds being exposed to such extreme cold in this stage of development had the potential to destroy the whole crop or at least extremely shunt growth of future stages of the plant's development this season. Danette documented the growth over the course of the weeks that followed, and fortunately, we were able to see only minimal damage to only a few of the plants.

The cold spell was followed by a long, slow, cool, wet spring. Farmers, especially grape farmers, don't usually complain about these conditions, except for the impact it has on your mood, as well as the ability to get out onto the farm itself. There were several atmospheric rivers throughout the spring, which made it quite difficult to do any further ground prep, as the tractors and mowers were only creating ruts in the ground, if they could even get out of the barn.



After bud break comes bloom. This event determines the number of berries which may potentially grow or how many grapes will be on each cluster. Bloom can last 1 – 3 weeks depending on weather and other variables.

This is when the flowers fertilize themselves, as they are not dependent on insects or other species to help with distribution of the pollen. Generally, bloom occurs 50 -80 days after bud break. We estimated that our bloom occurred right around July 4th, most likely the longer duration was due to the cold, wet spring.

Throughout this waiting time, we were able to visit with Lauren a few times. In April, where we were also able to attend [PINCC](#) annual fundraiser for the first time.



Right after bloom, Danette had the opportunity to attend a field days put on by [OSU](#) and Dr. Patty Skinkis' team. While informative, it really showed things that are far in the future for our small farm, but it was certainly informative to learn about clever things on the horizon that will help use fewer chemicals and allow farmers to be more focused in their efforts.



We look forward to our Fourth Harvest here at Aeolus Vineyards. We encourage you to buy wines from the [Eola-Amity Hills AVA](#) or at least [Willamette Valley](#). This year we only sold to two wine makers, who have very different wine making styles, [Stangeland](#) and [Landmass](#). Please visit both of their websites to learn what they have been up to since last year. A lot has been going on at both locations



Remember there is always an open bottle and empty glass waiting here for you. So just let us know when you will be by to [stay](#) a while. CHEERS!

Author: R. Elliott Mullens

Posted: August 7, 2022