



**Bennett Valley Grape Growers
Appellation Facts
1/20/22**

Our Mission:

To promote Bennett Valley as a premiere source of premium wine grapes and wines. To help our members improve grape quality and wine quality while promoting good stewardship of the land.

Appellation Facts:

Location: 45 Miles Northeast of San Francisco Total Acres in Appellation: 8,140
 Sonoma County's 13th Appellation, (Eff. 12/29/03) Estimated Planted Acres: 700
 Number of Active Bonded Wineries: 4 Number of Grower Brands: 7
 Percentage of Acreage Planted by Varietal: Merlot 26%, Pinot Noir 24%, Chardonnay
 20% Syrah 15% and Other 15%

Climatic Characteristics: Consistent marine influence throughout the growing season. A depression in the coastal mountains known as the Petaluma Wind Gap allows cool fog and wind to pour into the valley thru Crane Canyon moderating summer temperatures and creating conditions ideal for the production of ultra premium cool climate wine grapes.

Physical Geography: The appellation boundaries roughly correspond to the Matanzas Creek watershed. The valley, which is more accurately described as an alluvial bench, is surrounded by three mountains. Soils are varied, but many are rocky and volcanic in origin. Elevations range from 250 to 1,850 feet.

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Wine growing in Bennett Valley

Bennett Valley is a series of high sloping ridges, hills and swales suspended from Bennett Mountain to the north, Taylor Peak to the west and Sonoma Mountain to the south. Through a depression in the ridge line, ocean fog rolls into the valley and is contained by the surrounding mountains. Most of the planted acreage sits on bench land between 400 and 1,100 feet above sea level. The volcanic activity of the past has created a unique topography that provides a diversity of soil types, exposures and terrains.

With only a handful of bonded wineries within the appellation boundaries, wine growers recognize that they jointly shoulder the responsibility of defining their region. The average vineyard size is less than 15 acres. Most growers live on site and are actively involved with every aspect of the grape growing. The grapes of Bennett Valley are being used by California's most respected winemakers to create wines that are being recognized not only for their high quality but also for their distinct Bennett Valley character.

Bennett Valley had its first settlers in the mid 1800's and they quickly recognized the potential of the rich volcanic soils. The first vineyard was planted in 1862 and the reputation of the valley for producing high quality grapes began to grow. The combination of Phylloxera and Prohibition put an end to grape growing in Bennett Valley in the 1920's. In the mid -1970s, a handful of modern viticultural visionaries embraced the notion that cool climate varietals would thrive here and under careful guidance produce wines to rival the best from the old world. Largely due to the efforts of these individuals, the wine cognoscenti recognized Bennett Valley as an area that was synonymous with exceptional Merlot and Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

In the 1990s a wave of interest in Rhone varietals swept across California. Local growers found that these grapes did well, but it was Syrah above all others that expressed our unique climate and the terrain of our "valley in the mountains." Nuance and complexity, Syrahs from this appellation are reminiscent of the wines of the Northern Rhone region of France.



“Bennett Valley Merlot, Syrah and Pinot Noir are distinct from other wine growing regions.”

More recently, as new vineyards are planted and existing vineyards are replanted or converted, Pinot Noir acreage has steadily increased. Pinot Noir only reveals its subtle brilliance under certain conditions and a long cool growing season is one of the keys to this tricky varietal. Winemakers are sourcing Bennett Valley fruit and vineyard designated wines are beginning to appear. Growers and winemakers alike expect great things from this region as these newer plantings come of age.

While red wines from Bennett Valley are highly regarded, it is perhaps the white wines that best demonstrate the impact of our cool climate and commitment to “sense of place.” Despite their significant varietal differences, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and White Rhones grown in Bennett Valley share one common feature. They all maintain natural acidity levels that come from a long growing season marked by afternoon and morning fog. Often described as complex, structured, crisp, and bright, these are white wines that reflect the characteristics of their respective varietals but also demonstrate their cool climate origins.



“The white wines of Bennett Valley are expressions of the crisp and cool summer nights”