

An Open Letter to California's Grape Growers

Dear California Grape Growers,

I grew up on 16 acres of old vine Zin in Northern California's wine country. My family has been growing grapes in Dry Creek Valley since they immigrated from Italy in the early 1900s. My grandfather taught my dad everything he needed to know about managing a vineyard by the time he was eight. And then, he taught me and my brother. Growing grapes is in our blood.

When my grandparents came to California, Italians were the backbone of the agricultural industry. They were socially marginalized and economically oppressed. They worked hard and they worked for cheap, so that one day their kids could have what they never did. My great grandparents were lured to California by the American Dream and died never knowing it.

Today things have gotten better for California grape growers. Many of you have inherited multigenerational farms, the price of wine has skyrocketed since it was sold in a jug, and there's a new source of cheap labor: Mexican immigrants. Today, Mexican immigrants have replaced Italians as the region's primary agricultural labor force. 90% of California's farm workers are from Mexico and about half are undocumented (ucdavis.edu). These workers are struggling to survive, just like our ancestors decades ago, but these workers face a much more hostile political environment. Our President has labeled them "rapists and murders" and during the 2016 election promised to stop "uncontrolled, low-skilled immigration that continues to reduce jobs and wages for American workers" ([nyt.com](http://nytimes.com)). Clearly, these workers aren't a financial burden for you. Your livelihood depends on them. Without immigrants, 90% of your labor force would be gutted. That's why it's surprising that during the 2016 presidential election, California's AG community turned out to cast an enthusiastic vote for Donald Trump whose most notable campaign promise was deporting illegal immigrants. Trump won 113 cities, 25 counties, and 7 congressional districts (sos.ca.gov) across California. Though he lost by a margin of 30% to Hillary Clinton. I saw plenty of "Make America Great" stickers plastered on the bumpers of Ford pickup trucks in downtown Healdsburg. Support for Trump in California's rural communities was palpable.

I get it. You voted for Trump because you're tired of the government telling you what to do. The more government regulations the harder life is as a grape grower. The estate tax threatens your family farm, EPA standards make operating a farm a

red-tape infested affair, and a \$15 federal minimum wage would cut into your already low profit margin. But California isn't going red anytime soon. Our state hasn't voted for a Republican president since 1988 and in the last three consecutive presidential elections the Democratic nominee has surpassed 60% of the vote (270towin.com). So why not give up on turning California red and instead focus your efforts on a more realistic political goal. While you may not agree with everything the 2020 Democratic candidate will have to say, you can be sure their immigration policies will be more agriculturally friendly than our current President's. Trump's policies have led to severe labor shortages on California's farms. In 2017, 55% of farmers said they didn't have enough workers to meet their labor needs (cfbf.us). More relaxed federal immigration policies means increasing the flow of workers crossing the border to work on your farms. So why not joining your liberal Bay Area friends in supporting the pro-immigration candidate in the next presidential election. You can't afford not to.

Sincerely,
Amarica Rafanelli

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