

GROWTH OF PETITE SIRAH

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Wine changes all the time, and one of certain factors is how major trends develop that have no precursors.

Except to those who follow the tiny factors in the statistics.

If, for instance, you were to watch the major categories of wine sales and used only scanner data, you would miss the amazing growth in Riesling, which is seen not in scanner-related places, but in tasting rooms and in restaurants.

Now look at Petite Sirah, that little engine that could.

At the first PS I Love You symposium, California had but 65 growers and producers combined. A few weeks ago, the organization staged its seventh annual symposium and announced that the state had a combined 740 growers and producers.

Meanwhile, growth in planted acreage

has never been huge, year by year, but the steadiness of that growth has been impressive.

In the last few years, as the grape and wine supply has grown into a huge glut, acreage of Cabernet and Merlot have declined, Syrah acreage is flat and Petite Sirah keeps growing, 12% up in 2005, 6% up in 2006, 5% up in 2007, and 7% up in 2008.

When phylloxera hit California in the late 1980s, requiring tearing out of many vineyards, some growers saw the prices being paid for Cabernet and Merlot and tore out Petite Sirah, which dropped from its peak in 1976 (14,215 acres) to 1,738 in 1995.

Today, the state has nearly 8,000 acres of the varietal and according to the PS I Love You group, more than 620 wineries make a varietal Petite Sirah today.

Watching sales trends for Cab and Chardonnay tells only part of the story.

