

## **PETITE SIRAH GROWTH CURVE**

BY RUSTY EDDY

Just returned from the seventh annual Petite Sirah Symposium at Concannon Winery in Livermore (great host winery, by the way). What really struck me is how Petite Sirah acreage in California has increased so dramatically since 1995.

There was actually more Petite planted in 1976 (over 14,000 acres), but it's clear that growers began to pull it out as Chardonnay's popularity started to rise. I imagine White Zin also took a chunk of Petite's acres, so that by 1995 there were only 1,738 acres of Petite Sirah in the Golden State. Since then, acreage has increased annually, to over 7,300 acres in 2008.

And the region with the most Petite? It's Lodi and the Delta area. But coming in second is the Santa Barbara/San Luis area, including Paso Robles. Forty four percent of California's Petite Sirah

comes from these two regions.

Why does Petite continue to do well? It's not because any one winery makes a truckload every year (though Concannon and Bogle produce a bunch...), but it's because of how versatile Petite Sirah can be. It's not only bottled as a varietal, but it's often blended, especially to enhance thinner reds. It was noted today that with all of the Pinot Noir planted in marginal areas over the past few years, Petite should have a guaranteed place over the next few years as a 25% component of otherwise insipid Pinot.

By the way, at the walk-around tasting following the meeting, one rather prominent wine writer, who is not generally given to admitting preferences, told me that she really preferred the Clayhouse 2006 Estate Petite because it was one of the few being poured that had a real peppery character.

