

## **PETITE-O-FILES GATHER IN LIVERMORE FOR 7TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM**

BY LAURA NESS

Primarily a backbone blender, Petite Sirah has long suffered the indignities of anonymity. Just ask any member of the P.S. I Love You organization that held its 7th annual Petite Sirah Noble Symposium at Concannon on Tuesday, August 4. Petite-ophiles came from as far away as Rogue River, Oregon to Ramona Valley in San Diego, to share their enthusiasm for this massively dark and often misunderstood varietal that adds star power to blends with few starring roles. In between were wineries from Lake County, Mendocino, Napa, Dry Creek, Sonoma, Paso Robles, Lodi, and Santa Clara.

Organizer Jo Diaz announced that the petition to the TTB stating that Durif and Petite Sirah be recognized as one in the same, is on solid ground: the agency concurs there is enough evidence to substantiate this claim. Jim Concannon declared this "the single-most important thing that PS I Love You has done!" Hopefully, it puts an end to confusion over Durif vs Petite nursery stock, which up until now had to be bottle labeled separately.

Symposium sponsor Concannon began the varietal trend in 1964, in response to a retailer suggestion. Concannon is one of 30 Petite producers in Livermore: they farm 100 of the 260 acres planted here. Sadly, they were the sole Livermore winery represented.

Petite peaked in 1976 with 14,215 acres planted: it suffered massive decline to a low of 1,738 measly acres in 1995, enjoying a renaissance to about 7,320 acres planted as of 2008. Producers of the variety have gone from a low of 65 to the present 620.

Data presented by Christian Miller of Full Glass Research, emphasized the Pet glass is half empty now, but certainly half-filled with opportunity. First and foremost, clear up the confusion between Syrah

and Petite Sirah. 46% of those surveyed did not know the difference between them or thought they were synonyms. Most said they knew little about Petite Sirah (45%), 31% associated it with CA and 21% said it makes dark, intense and tannic wines. Only 7% thought it could not achieve the same quality as Pinot or Cabernet. Most Petites sell in the \$15 to \$20 price range, and most Pet-based blends carry unique proprietary names. Top complaints from producers are lack of consumer awareness, followed by lack of restaurant and retail support.

Although Petite was bred in the south of France, it only took off in California and is found nowhere else. Prone to wood disease and virus, the oldest Petite Sirah still hangs on in field blends. Bill Pease of Madrigal Vineyards hailed proper drainage and avoiding stressful chemical as key to preserving "vines clinging to the very edge of life" in an old vineyard in Napa.

David Gates of Ridge said that 85% of their Petite Sirah goes into Zin blends: "That huge sucking sound is Zinfandel crying out for Petite Sirah!"



John Monnich of Silkwood suggested bunchrot could be reduced via root boosting yielding to looser v tightfisted clusters. Strategic applications of a high oxin seaweed extract (Kelpac) prior to bloom, then 21 days

after, yields longer, looser bunches, due to its root-boosting action. Rot has gone from 40% to a max of 4%, with no flavor impact.

