

*A newsletter produced for foothill wine grape growers and grape industry by your local
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Special Bulletin: Dormant Season Irrigation During Drought

Should you consider a dormant season irrigation for your grapevines this dry winter? Many UC Farm Advisors and industry consultants are advising just that this year, especially in locations where rainfall has been less than an inch for the months of November and December. I went to the local CIMIS data and found these numbers for our rainfall accumulation since July, 2011.

Precipitation in Inches: Foothill CIMIS Stations from July 2011 to January 20, 2012

Month Year	Station 13-Camino	Station 228-Diamond Spings	Station 227-Plymouth
Jul-11	0	0.86	0.07
Aug-11	0	0	0
Sep-11	0.04	0	0.06
Oct-11	4.65	2.14	1.05
Nov-11	1.57	0.89	0.47
Dec-11	0.04	0.09	0.02
Jan-12	0	0	0
SUM to date	6.3	3.98	1.67

Dormant season irrigations will help to alleviate problems that have been shown to appear in springs following drought winters. Poor and irregular shoot growth, drought induced nutritional deficiencies such as Boron, and even flower primordial abortion can occur in drought stressed vines. Drought stressed vines and orchards can exhibit phytotoxicity reactions if treated with dormant sprays, such as oil.

Paul Verdegaal, UCCE Advisor-San Joaquin County, is recommending the following to his growers: yes irrigate anytime now, depending on soil type and other objectives (weed spray, dormant spray, or field work). Begin with 0.5 to 0.75 acre inches (divided into 2 or 3 multiple sets if sandy soil). If it rains in the next 10 to 12 days; irrigate again right before the rain, with another 0.5 to .75 acre inches. If no rain irrigate again anyway in the next 2-3 weeks. Likewise, former foothill Advisor and local consultant Donna Hirschfeld has sent her recommendations for irrigating about one acre inch, if it is at all feasible. Steve Vasquez, UCCE Viticulture Advisor -Fresno County, and UC Specialist Matt Fidelibus sent out a notice entitled "The time to irrigate is now!" on their blog. You can read it and see pictures of delayed spring growth at <http://ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=6483>

Soil moisture is going to vary with texture and depth and these can be quite variable in the foothills from region to region and even within a given parcel. Although we are not the Valley, it wouldn't hurt to dig some holes and at least have some idea of where your soil moisture is at right now. And if you irrigate, you can check your drip systems to get them ready for spring. With a few buds starting to swell, one question has come up: Will irrigating push bud break? The answer appears to be "no", and irrigating overhead, or getting a good amount of soil moisture, can actually lower vine temperatures and possibly delay bud break, according to Rick Snyder, UCCE Biometeorology Specialist.