

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grain-inducing pinot

Dear Truckers:

Fall 2015

Greetings from Napa, where the truck is green, the Pinot is Noir, and the ground is brown.

Our fourth consecutive year of drought is now officially on the record books. I get asked, almost daily, "What's the drought doing to you?" Well, the dry, lumpy ground is making it hard to coach my daughter's soccer team. Our formerly high-definition-green lawn is now a wasteland. And last year's ski season was reduced to a short run down a 12-foot-wide ribbon of brown snow.

And the grapes (you were asking about the grapes)? You know, they don't really care so much. Vines, by their DNA, are drought-tolerant; it doesn't take that much water to keep them happy. In fact, drought stress can lead to some crazy-good quality vino. The dry/warm ground did bring a very early season and harvest (Exhibit A: I'm writing this letter well before my usual Thanksgiving deadline).

The intense dryness also fueled some awful fires in California; I suspect you heard about them. The smoke and flames were way north, so my vines and wines were unaffected. But a lot of folks—including many of Napa's workers—live over the hill near the path of that 100-square-mile inferno. CAL FIRE said the fires broke every computer model they'd ever run. We, as a valley, are still working to help those affected. It has been a very sobering event for the wine world.

Ultimately, we had a minuscule harvest in 2015 for Pinot Noir—I got about 60 percent of my normal yields—but it's a little hard to say if this was directly drought-related. Yields tend to be cyclical anyway, and we'd just enjoyed three consecutive bumper crops. The thing is, low yields lead to great intensity. So, setting aside some pesky financial issues, and the fact that allocations are going to be tight (you've been forewarned), I made an absolutely killer Pinot Noir in 2015.

As the regular truckers know, I am offering no wine with this fall update. Things sold out particularly rapidly last spring. I am very eager to share the tasty 2014 (drought *and* earthquake!) Pinot Noir with you next spring; that wine is safely (and tastily) in bottle and awaiting liberation in March.

I mentioned the early writing/mailing of this fall update. I'm actually penning this a few days after Halloween, and I gotta say, things are seriously looking up. Our son dressed up as Kylo Ren (the new Sith Lord) for trick-or-treating; that made me realize that the new Star Wars movie is only a few weeks away (geek alert: This is a *big* deal to me). It's actually raining today — hard — for the first time in 10 months (audible sigh of relief); they are projecting this as the first of the El Nino storms. And, the Royals just won the World Series. Since I have a lot of truckers in New York, I won't gloat. But that win ended a different drought — one that had lasted 30 years since the 1985 Royals World Series victory that I celebrated as a 15-year-old back in Kansas.

I'm also getting more time than usual to prep for Thanksgiving, my favorite holiday. Turkey Day was tailor-made for Pinot Noir, and I'm always honored and excited when folks open Road 31 to accompany the bird. The drought, the minuscule yields, threatening conflagrations ... it's all worthwhile when I get the honor of sharing your holiday table in liquid spirit.

Thanks for your support of my dream,



Kent Fortner

(Winemaker/Truck-Owner/King of the Road)



NAPA VALLEY