

Adopt a Row at Staffords' Vineyard - January 2026

How many of you have wished to have your own vineyard or at a minimum, the opportunity to make more active choices in the grapes harvested for your home winemaking? If this is of interest to you, please continue reading. . .

The Adopt a Row Program objectives are to enable home winemakers in the decision making over the quality of the grapes they want to use in making wine, learn more about viticulture and experience the growing season of a small vineyard without relocating to do so or planting their own vineyard. Anyone who wishes to learn more about the growing aspects of a vineyard and the influences towards making quality wine is welcome to participate in this program.

The vineyard is located in the Fiddletown AVA of the Sierra Foothills of California. This is a private vineyard owned and on the private property of Ken and Leah Stafford. Part of the vineyard has been in place since before 2009. It was expanded in 2017 and more was to be planted until the Staffords decided to not become a commercial winery. Since then, and as the Staffords have aged, they are making less wine and they can benefit from others helping with vineyard tasks. The upside of this program is that the Staffords will share their knowledge of growing high quality grapes which took over a decade of research, mentoring from some of the best commercial growers in the state and hands-on work.

Ken Stafford has provided many articles on curating small or hobbyist vineyards in WineMaker magazine. Ken also provided conference sessions on vineyard pruning topics at WineMaker Magazine Conferences in the past years. He has successfully made award winning wines from this vineyard, over the years.

Leah Stafford has been at her husband's side doing a great deal of the manual work in the vineyard as well as being a wine educator and judge. Many times she noted in suggestions to amateur wine entries that better grapes were needed for improved quality of wines. "Good wine begins with good grapes, from a well cared for vineyard." Mechanical harvesting and other commercial tasks for large vineyards ultimately diminish the quality of grapes, but a large winery has their own computerized means to make alterations and improve wine quality to ensure a consistent product for the consumer. When a home winemaker purchases these grapes, for small batch home wines, the diminished quality of grapes is reflected in the finished product.

It has been Ken and Leah's earlier experiences where they were at the mercy of a commercial vineyard and the quality of grapes that they were able to procure for home winemaking. There have been times where grapes purchased from commercial wineries were not at desired Brix levels. As may be the same for other home winemakers, there are times the grapes have sat too long at the harvest docks/crush pad before picked up, this too can create many off-putting notes in the finished wines.

The grapes from Stafford Family Vineyard have been meticulously cared for by hand labor for years. Minimal chemical applications have been used since there are costs incurred with this and detrimental effects with such interventions. Sustainable farm practices of cover cropping, maintaining overall vineyard health and adhering to the proven principles of "Sunlight Into Wine" were utilized.

First of March, those who wish to participate in the Adopt a Row Program in the Stafford vineyard can sign up to do so. At this time participants get to select their row or rows of the various varieties planted and will begin to manage the row/rows under the education and advice of Ken and Leah Stafford. The

March timeframe will give participants the opportunity to prepare for spur pruning activities that begin shortly thereafter. Participants will be responsible for the entire care of their selected vines with the exception of watering and bi-monthly organic spraying to prevent powdery mildew. As this is necessary in a timely manner for the healthy state of the entire vineyard. Weed abatement is also crucial to prevent an environment for vectors that can also spread disease, such as Laceywing sharp shooter.

The only spraying done is for fungal issues. Stylet oil is sprayed on a rotated schedule with other fungicides as advised by UC Davis grape pest management research. A shared portion of the costs of the fungal control materials will be requested as spraying must be done for the health of the entire vineyard. All other manual tasks will be your responsibility to keep your rows producing the quality of fruit you desire. Keep in mind that the Staffords will need to be home to allow your entrance to the property, therefore a coordination of time will need to be communicated.

The grapes that are up for adoption are: Zinfandel, Barbera, Sauvignon Blanc, Grenache and Petite Sirah. There is a limited number of rows and a couple of rows have already been spoken for.

Tasks required for winegrape production are based on certain timeframes of the growing season. An outline of this time line will be provided so your personal plans can be made around these needs. There is some flexibility of timing to tasks needed by the grapes, but if the tasks are not done by the adopters, then forfeiture of the selected rows may result. Remember some tasks must be done in order to keep the entire vineyard healthy.

Harvest time is at your discretion; adopters will need to make their own arrangements for transportation of harvested grapes. Crush can be a shared expense, if the harvest date is decided to be in conjunction with that of the Staffords' harvest.

Please reach out via email to share your interest and in what varieties it is you wish to curate.
kenleah@staffordsmountainhome.com

Cheers! The Staffords