

## In memoriam: Don Luvisi

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Donald A. Luvisi, UC Cooperative Extension Viticulture Advisor emeritus of Kern County. Don passed away in Bakersfield on July 10 at the age of 87.

Don served as the Viticulture Farm Advisor for Kern County from 1960 until his retirement 39 years later in 1999 and was widely recognized as a pioneer of the modern-day California table grape industry. His research influenced a significant expansion in the production of varieties such as 'Flame Seedless,' 'Redglobe' and 'Crimson Seedless,' along with improvements in fruit quality associated with his work with gibberellin, ethephon and girdling.

Don was widely regarded as an expert in postharvest handling of table grapes due to the impacts of his work on sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) fumigation. In 1987, SO<sub>2</sub> was removed from the 'Generally Regarded As Safe' (GRAS) listing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and as a result, residue data and new application patterns had to be developed to prevent grapes from decaying in storage. Don responded through his participation in more than 20 experiments annually that led to the acceptance and conversion of much of the industry from traditional fumigation to the "Total Utilization Fumigation" method. The restoration of newly approved post-harvest SO<sub>2</sub> fumigation methods were estimated to prevent 40-50% losses in table grape production that at the time was valued at \$200 million to \$250 million USD.

The last decade of Don's career was focused on the evaluation of rootstocks for table grape production. These rootstocks were developed as a response to growers reporting replant problems in second- and third-generation vineyards due to the buildup of plant-parasitic nematodes in the soil. Don conducted more than a dozen decade-long trials evaluating the performance of common table grape varieties on these rootstocks that led to guidelines for their use by local growers. The use of soil-borne pest resistant rootstocks has become an industry standard practice within the California table grape industry.

After retiring in 1999, Don split his time between Bakersfield and Calistoga, where he managed a family vineyard. When in Bakersfield, he was generous with his time as a mentor to three subsequent UCCE Kern County Viticulture advisors, and frequently met with his friends within the table grape industry. In the early 2000s, he was highly influential in the development of the 'General Beale Pilot Project' that developed and tested areawide management programs to control the glassy-winged sharpshooter, a vector of the potentially devastating Pierce's disease of grapevines. His knowledge of the grape industry, combined with the personal relationships he had developed over a lifetime, proved invaluable in establishing this highly successful project that remains effective today.

Following his passing, former UCCE Viticulture Advisor Jennifer Hashim-Maguire stated, "I'm forever grateful for having Don as a mentor and friend. His early tutelage at Cooperative Extension sowed the seeds of a career in table grape production that now spans decades and several countries. His passion for the advancement of the grape industry was contagious and unsurpassed. As a (wine) grower himself, he understood first-hand the challenges of farming and was eager and generous to share technical information and solutions with growers all over the world. Don's legacy is measured not just in past research conducted and the growers he helped throughout his life, but in his kindness and the numerous relationships he cultivated in the industry from California to Australia, Chile to Greece and numerous places in-between. The global table grape industry is an interconnected extended family and I know that I'm only one of many who will miss him deeply.

Funeral services will be held at St. Francis Church in Bakersfield on Tuesday, July 30. Services will begin at 8:30 a.m. and include a visitation, rosary and celebration of life. Burial will take place at 10:30 a.m. on Aug 1 following a graveside service at the Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in St. Helena and a celebration of life at Highlands Christian Fellowship located at 970 Petrified Forest Rd. in Calistoga at 12:30 p.m.

Those wishing to honor Don's life through contributions are encouraged to donate to the Don and Mickie Luvisi Agriculture Scholarship at Calistoga Junior/Senior High School (Contact: Carla Surber, [csurber@calistogajusd.org](mailto:csurber@calistogajusd.org)).