



CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

Deeply rooted in California

Grape-growing family continues into sixth generation

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Jerry Fry and his son, Bruce, operate Mohr-Fry Ranches, a family ranch in Lodi that grows about a dozen varieties of grapes. The family's farming roots were established in the 1850s by Cornelius Mohr.

When a Danish whaling ship dropped anchor in San Francisco in 1852 to pick up supplies, a 32-year-old seaman left the vessel. His intention was to prospect for gold, but he soon discovered that California's riches could be found instead by farming the land. Once established, he sent home for his bride, built a home and started a family.



Now in their sixth generation, the descendants of Cornelius Mohr continue to work the land with the same passion their forefather displayed so many decades ago.

"Farming is in your blood. You can't be forced to do it because it is hard work, but I just knew from day one that this is what I wanted to do," said Bruce Fry, Cornelius' great-great grandson. Bruce and his father, Jerry Fry, operate Mohr-Fry Ranches, which has since moved from its original spot in Mount Eden in San Francisco's East Bay to Lodi, an emerging wine region in the heart of California's fertile Central Valley. While the father-son team manage some 720 acres of winegrapes, Jerry's two sisters, Gayle Tully and Alfreda Andrews, oversee the administrative duties for the ranch at the original homestead that Cornelius built 132 years ago.

Descendants of Cornelius Mohr gather at the Lodi ranch they purchased in 1965. They are, clockwise from lower left, Bruce, Jerry, Julia, Mohrgan, Lora and Peggy Fry.

"Of my three brothers and five cousins, I am the only one that chose to work on the farm," Bruce said. "I love being outdoors and being able to set my own hours. Farming is something that I just love to do."

He also hopes his love of the land will translate to his daughters, Mohrgan, 6, and 4-year-old Julia, both of whom were named after ancestors.

"They love playing outside and playing in the dirt and getting muddy, so farming is right up their alley," their father said. "They can do what they



want. If they want to learn more about it, great. If not, it is their choice. But they love living on the ranch."



Mohr-Fry Ranches sells winegrapes to about 20 wineries throughout California and out of state. The wineries that purchase the family's grapes have received numerous awards for their wines, including "Best Zinfandel" from the California State Fair in 2003. This was for St. Amant's Old Vine Zinfandel grown at Marian's Vineyard on the family's property, a favorite spot for their 16 pet peacocks to wander.

Mohr-Fry Ranches grows about a dozen varieties of grapes, including reds such as alicante bouschet, cabernet sauvignon, malbec, merlot, pinot noir, petite sirah and sangiovese. Whites include chardonnay, pinot gris, sauvignon blanc and viognier. The ranch also features 175 acres of old zinfandel vines, heritage vines whose grapes are prized for their superior quality and intense flavor.

There are two blocks of old zinfandel vines on the property, including one planted in 1901 and one in 1944. The 1901 block is named Marian's Vineyard after Bruce's grandmother, Marian Fry, who was Cornelius' granddaughter.

Winegrapes from Marian's Vineyard are sold to St. Amant Winery in Lodi and are used to create not only the winery's award-winning Marian's Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel but also Mohr-Fry Ranch Old Vine Zinfandel.

"One of the things that was very important to us is we wanted to recognize our mother by adding Marian's name on the label," said daughter Alfreda. "It is something we wanted to do to honor our heritage."

Marian, who passed away last fall at the age of 94, was the family matriarch and one of the first women to study agriculture at the University of California, Berkeley. She graduated in 1935 with a degree in agricultural business.



"She was a very elegant, dignified lady. She personified all of the elements of a wonderful grandmother and mother, but she also was a regal person in terms of her demeanor," Alfreda said. "When you met her you wouldn't think 'farmer' right away. Everyone who met her always came away with a feeling of admiration and respect."

Marian and her husband, Jerryl Sr., made quite an impression on all their children and taught them the importance of integrity, a quality they could use in everyday life as well as when conducting business.

"Integrity was instilled into us all along because if you do not have that, then it will come back to bite you," Jerry said. "We've got several contracts with just a handshake. We just agree to do it and try to work with the wineries and develop relationships--that is what it is all about."

Not surprisingly, in 2000 Jerry received the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission's annual award for the individual who has conducted his career with integrity while making significant contributions in the world of wine.

Jerry said he knew as his sons were growing up on the Lodi ranch purchased in 1965 that for Bruce, farming was a calling. As soon as the boy was old enough to maneuver a pair of long-handled shears, he was pruning grapevines. In 1995 after graduating from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, with a degree in agricultural business, Bruce returned to the farm to work with his father.

"I graduated on a Friday and went to work on Monday," Bruce said. "I've developed my dad's trust level. He's seen me grow up enough that he trusts what I'm doing and he lets me learn from my mistakes. We have a good relationship and I'm absorbing all of his knowledge."

Mohr-Fry Ranches, one of about 700 winegrape growers in Lodi, is dedicated to the environment and as a result is one of the relative few to be certified under the Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing. Through this program, the Frys have implemented a variety of ecologically based practices such as reducing pesticide use, improving soil and water quality, and enhancing wildlife habitat and ecosystem health. Of all of the "eco-labels" that can be found on products, wine containing the Lodi Rules label indicates that the winegrapes have met a specific set of environmental and/or social standards. Under this program, wines produced with Mohr-Fry Ranch grapes, including those by St. Amant, can bear the "Lodi Rules" logo.

Since the 1980s, the Frys have utilized cover crops in each row of their vineyards. Cover crops are close-growing grasses, grains or grain-legume mixes that help improve the soil, filter the rain and irrigation water, and reduce the potential for dust and pests. The cover crops also help support equipment during wet weather.

The Mokelumne River, which winds its way just a few yards from the rows of gnarled old zinfandel vines, attracts a variety of native species. It's not unusual for Jerry or Bruce to catch a glimpse of a coyote or a red-tailed hawk while they're working on their irrigation system or checking the vineyard for insects. Other species who call the ranch home include beaver, deer, wild turkeys, owls, doves, raptors, vultures, bats and gopher snakes, and salmon and steelhead in the river. The family is currently working on projects to further enhance the environmental landscape of their land by creating additional habitat.

Mark Chandler, executive director of the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission, has known the Frys for nearly two decades and holds the family--particularly Jerry--in high regard.

"He is cut from the cloth of California's early agriculturalists who were pioneers, businessmen and statesmen. They were able to balance the needs of their own interests with those of the greater good and created the institutions that serve us today," Chandler said. "Jerry is that kind of person. He is a man who thinks things through with an eye to the long term, and his opinion is greatly respected by the community. I call him one of the



'princes' of Lodi. The place would not be the same without him."

As for the Frys, they say the secret of their success can be defined with one word: integrity.

"We try to be a company of integrity by treating our employees fairly, by using sustainable growing practices and by treating whomever we do business with fairly. We learned that from our heritage, our family," Alfreda said.

"That is important to us. It doesn't have anything to do with the flavor of the wine, but everything we do we try and do with integrity and fairness."

Stuck in Lodi and loving the wine

Credence Clearwater Revival may need to rethink the lyrics to its classic "Lodi" tune, which laments being stuck in this San Joaquin County town. The Lodi area--today a top-notch, yet uncrowded wine destination--is home to nearly 70 wineries, hundreds of Lodi-labeled wines and thousands of acres of premium winegrapes.

"What is really special about Lodi are the climate and the growers," said Bruce Fry of Mohr-Fry Ranches in Lodi.

"You have to have a good climate to grow good quality grapes, and we are in a unique location that has good soils to grow a good, diverse amount of grapes and produce a good bottle of wine."

Designated as an American Viticulture Area (AVA) by the federal government in 1986, the Lodi appellation is noted for its classic Mediterranean climate and its distinctive sandy soils that provide the perfect environment for producing world-class wines. An appellation is a geographical indication used to identify where the grapes for a wine are grown. The Lodi appellation is east of San Francisco at the edge of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. It is at a winery's discretion to include an appellation on their label.

Over the years, as the quality and recognition of Lodi wines spread, local winegrowers recognized the wide variety of ecological differences across the appellation--differences that began to show in the wines emerging from their vineyards.

These growers sought to create sub-appellations to better reflect the diversity of the land. In 2006 the government granted recognition to seven appellations within Lodi: Alta Mesa, Borden Ranch, Clements Hills, Cosumnes River, Jahant, Mokelumne River and Sloughhouse.

So while Lodi may have inspired an unflattering song in the '60s, visitors today will discover that this emerging jewel of California wine has much to offer. For more information, visit www.lodiwine.com.

Eat, drink and be merry

When it comes to pairing food and wine, the first rule is to keep it simple. In other words, don't place too many constraints on the decision-making process.

"Enjoy the wines you like to drink with the foods you like to eat," said winemaker Stuart Spencer, part owner of St. Amant Winery, a family operation in Lodi. "However, there are a few guidelines that might make the food and wine pairing work better. Many people really enjoy exploring the interaction of the two and at times a great combination can elevate both the food and wine experience."

With the summer grilling season in full swing, Spencer provides these tips for pairing hot-off-the-grill favorites with California wines:

Steak: Steaks call for full-bodied reds to pair with the richness and flavor of the meat. Ripe, full-bodied versions of cabernet sauvignon, zinfandel and petite sirah work particularly well. The saltiness of well-seasoned steaks can balance the tannin and intensity of these reds. Spencer also recommends serving red wines slightly chilled during the summer months.

Chicken: Grilled chicken can be great with almost any wine, from lighter-bodied whites such as sauvignon blanc and California pinot grigio to medium-bodied reds such as barbera. As the chicken becomes more intensely flavored with marinades or spice rubs, it might pair better with a fuller-bodied white such as chardonnay or viognier. Chicken glazed in barbecue sauce works particularly well with fruit-driven Lodi zinfandels and petite sirahs.

Ribs: The quintessential pairing for grilled ribs is zinfandel. However, spicy and fruity syrah, petite sirah and many other gutsy reds will work well. Be careful with very spicy rubs that can make some full-bodied reds taste stronger and bitter.

Fish: It all depends on the type and preparation of the fish. The intensity and weight of grilled salmon goes particularly well with fruity medium-bodied reds such as pinot noir or merlot. Traditionalists are more likely to prefer a white such as sauvignon blanc or viognier.

Hamburgers and hot dogs: All-American food calls for an all-American wine--zinfandel. California's own zinfandel with intense fruit flavors and delicious spiciness goes perfectly with these favorites.

Dessert: The classic rule is that the wine should always be sweeter than the dessert. Grilled peaches or nectarines with homemade vanilla ice cream make for a wonderful end to a summer evening. Just add a fruity late harvest white such as viognier or riesling.

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