

09.1.14

DROUGHT, DROUGHT, and more DROUGHT was the buzz for 2014.

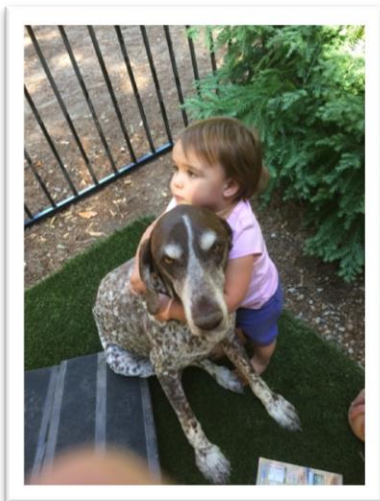
The Paso Robles area was not exempt from this problem and any substantial rain wouldn't come until March. In all, Paso Robles airport only reported a total of 5.92" for the 2013-14 rain season; our rain gauge measuring a meager 7.61". However, the damage had quietly been done. When the period for the trees to bloom came (usually between mid-March through mid-May), almost all of our Coratina, Pendolino & Leccino trees started the process; however, most of our Frantoio & Maurino bloomed only lightly or failed to bloom at all. This was very distressing since we had spent some time preparing the trees for what we thought would be the 'ON' (higher yield) cycle this year which included topping and fertilizing. Had we done something wrong? And why did some varieties bloom and not others?

We decided to dig for some answers via the COOC (California Olive Oil Council) website – just one more reason to be a member besides certification. This led us to the US Davis Olive Center that provides growers essential information & resources. We were able to locate a 1953 article discussing Olive Fruiting Behavior and soil moisture during floral development (listed on our Links page). Wow, over 60 years ago the same issue was observed and studied because drought is nothing new to California agriculture, let alone olive orchards. The verdict: *It's important to keep the trees well supplied with moisture during the early part of the flower formation (microscopic) when the inflorescences-the flower clusters-make their initial one inch growth.* At that point we had only received around 2" of rain and had not begun to water. Yet after speaking with other growers, apparently almost everyone got caught off guard and experienced the same conditions we had.



To our surprise, the trees that bloomed held their fruit and the olive sizes are shaping up to be the largest we've had to date. We've also been very proactive against the olive fly so to protect the maturing fruit we have. Not sure how many pounds/oil we'll end up with, but it will be interesting to see how our 'field blend' turns out this year.

Stay tuned for more after the harvest...



In Memory: On June 18th, we lost our German shorthaired pointer "Tuscan Dante" of 11-1/2 years while on vacation in Santa Cruz. He had the best/last 2 days of his life. Although he succumbed to canine congestive heart failure, you would have never known he was ill. Our sweet boy was a hunter, adventurer & unselfish companion to the end.

10.25.14

Well, the harvest happened – if that's what the local olive growers want to call it this year. Our fruit was gorgeous, just not much of it to write home about at 150 pounds total (yielded roughly 2-1/2 gallons). We know our orchard is still very young, yet it's still a bit of a bummer to yield so little after all of our hard work and from the high expectations of last year. Consequently, we really don't have enough to send off for analysis and certification and, therefore, have to forgo the 2015 COOC EVOO seal and any competitions on this blend.





12.31.14

GROWTH GOING FORWARD: We decided to make a larger capital investment toward our little olive business and purchased a Campagnola "BuonOlio" oil mill & loader/washer. This small mill can process roughly 175 lbs./hr. Since it was delivered early October, we got to take it on a test run with this year's small harvest!

As the trees mature, weather conditions improve & tonnage increases, it just might be super wise that we did the purchase now. In the meantime, we have a lot to learn and can see some US Davis master milling classes in our future!

Another plan for 2015 (contingent on if we received early rain and how much) is to add to the grove and plant another 40-50 trees, ending up with approximately 150-160 trees total. Our long-term goal to achieve profitability is to yield a minimum of at least 3-4 tons or approximately 80-100 gallons of high quality EVOO (based on our gallon/ton % yield history).

Fortunately, rain did come and thus far at a good amount (7.75" at our location). So we are ahead of the game compared to last year. However, we are still rain deficient and thus looking into water conservation methods. One option is the use of worm casings that has reportedly cut water usage by 50-75%. This looks very interesting...and cool.

With an El Nino and positive phase Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO)* condition, confidence is high for a normal-to-above-normal rain season. Let's hope for that and for a better and bountiful 2015 year!

The Partridges



*<http://jisao.washington.edu/pdo/>