

OUTER COASTAL PLAIN VINEYARD ASSOCIATION
Quarterly Meeting Minutes – 5-14-26

The quarterly meeting of the OCPVA was held at Auburn Road Vineyard & Winery on Thursday, May 14th at 6pm. Board Chairperson Mark Hernandez called the meeting to order at 6:26 pm, and the minutes of the February 2026 meeting were approved and accepted.

Treasurer's report:

Julianne Donnini board treasurer, informed the members of the current bank account balances:

Primary Checking: \$7707.36

Money Market Savings: \$30902.53

Total: \$38609.89

Introduction of New Board Members/Positions

Mark updated the membership of the new board members and position changes.

Mark Hernandez- New Board Chairperson Madeline Cozine-New board member

Continuing Members: Jim Quarella, Julianne Donnini-Treasurer; Dante Romanini-Secretary; Joe Procopio, Larry Coia, Peter Szerdahelyi

FLX WINE: Wine swap with some of the Finger Lake Wineries to develop a learning relationship between wine communities. Jules explained this is an informal tasting they do with their colleagues. They will collect wine from Finger Lakes and send it to us. The OCPVA would like to put this as a focus of one of our quarterly meetings. Jules asked for tasting notes, they said they can be very critical, but this is the process to help become better wine makers. More to come!

Agritourism Grant Update: This grant was heavily applied for and sporadically received by vineyards. Jim Quarella informed the group he received an update from Billy Connors (Dept. Of Ag) stating the criteria explained on the grant application were used and everyone who applied will have access to that information once the list is available.

Membership to the OCPVA: Now open to the entire state of New Jersey

Mask Fitting Event: May 21st 4-5pm Autumn Lake Winery - Details are available on the Spring Newsletter and email.

American Vineyard Magazine: Free to subscribe. The more subscription we have in our region, the more ads and articles will be written about us. This is free publicity and free to subscribe.

Frost Damage: Anyone who has suffered frost damage is encouraged to call your local FSA Office and report your damage. The more of us who call the better chances we have of getting funding from Trenton or Washington, DC.

Google: FSA Office-Put in zip code to receive your local office phone number.

Hemant informed group Rutgers Cooperative Extension is conducting **2026 Frost Damage Survey in Fruit Crops**. He will be passing out the survey with a stamped return envelope. This is another great way to communicate its impact to legislative offices.

Brief Overview of Grant Funding Projects:

Mark gave an update on the grant applications recently submitted. A grant proposal written by Larry Coia, seeks funding through the Wine Industry Council to partner with the Rutgers Experimental Station and vineyard to install new trellising and plant additional vineyard acreage. The grape varieties selected for the project will be chosen based on their suitability for local growing conditions, including factors such as disease resistance.

The board is also pursuing a Specialty Crop Block Grant to promote the proprietary wine blend known as Coeur d'Est. The proposal includes three major components:

- Hosting two public and media-focused promotional events at participating wineries. It will be a charged event which will generate a little income, get more exposure and educate the consumer and media.
- Two advertisements in a well-known food publication. Advertorial is a paid photograph, advertisement and a page of copy in which we choose the message we want to convey.
- Develop a new Coeur d'Est trail app to help guide visitors to wineries producing the blend.

The overall goal of these initiatives is to increase consumer awareness and demand for Coeur d'Est wines, which would in turn benefit both grape growers and wineries by increasing grape sales and wine sales. During a brief question-and-answer period, it was clarified that any member of the All members of the Outer Coastal Plain Vineyard Association is eligible to produce a Coeur d'Est blend, provided they follow the rules posted on the association's website.

Viticulturist Philosophy Speaker

Mike Beneduce-Beneduce Vineyards Hunterdon County, NJ

Mike described his journey to become a herbicide free vineyard. The early farming practices he used going back about 17 years was to maintain a completely weed-free strip under vineyard rows to eliminate competition for water and nutrients. At that time, he followed conventional methods used widely in the industry, including herbicides like Roundup and pre-emergent treatments to maintain a “scorched earth” approach with virtually no weeds.

Mike discussed a trip about 15 years ago to Austria in a wet growing area like his own and then entire vineyard was covered in green lush grass. He also shared how travel has been an important part of his learning as a grower, noting that farmers he has visited often openly share their experiences and mistakes. These experiences helped shape his thinking and encouraged him to explore alternative approaches.

Mike explained that his transition to herbicide-free vineyard farming required gradual, incremental change rather than an immediate switch. He emphasizes starting with small pilot blocks, learning from them, and then scaling up over time and that they eventually reached a fully herbicide-free 27-acre vineyard. He noted that this approach may not work the same way in all regions but encourages growers to experiment and learn from one another.

He discussed his philosophy of sustainability as a balance of people, planet, and profit, and that farming practices must support environmental health, worker safety, and economic viability. Mike also highlighted benefits such as deeper root systems, reduced fertilizer needs, and improved access to soil nutrients, contributing to healthier and more balanced vines.

Additional benefits include improved soil health and biodiversity, measurable improvements in nitrogen balance and reduced erosion. There are operational advantages such as lower long-term costs, reduced chemical exposure for workers, and potential marketing value for sustainably produced wine. The challenges were increased labor during transition, rodent pressure in some cases, frost management trade-offs, and the need to accept a less “tidy” vineyard appearance. Finally, he notes important lessons learned, such as avoiding this approach in newly planted vineyards due to their vulnerability and recommends starting small rather than converting large areas at once.

Key Take Aways:

- Start small
- Stay adaptable
- Be Curious
- Try Things
- Leverage Sustainability

Thank you Mike!

Presentation: Paul Licata-BDI Machinery Sales, Inc.

BDI has been around for 30 years with a large part of market share based on referrals. Paul provided their catalog and presented information about mechanization and equipment solutions and highlighting a few products (sprayers, hedgers, mechanized organic weed control equipment, mowers)

BDI backs their equipment reliability and is always available to address any issues their customer's encounter. They provide a consultative experience to understand the client's needs and make suggestions based on the specific needs of the customer.

Thank you Paul!

**Presentation: Dr. Nancy Sharma PhD. Extension Specialist in Fruit Pathology,
Rutgers Cooperative Extension:** nancy.sharma@rutgers.edu

Research plans for the next two years:

- Fungicide Resistance-Nancy has been working on this for many years. Starting with USDA funded project looking for frack 11 resistances in grape powder mildew and how it will affect the ability to control it. Nancy can give us a Fact Sheet to refer to after receiving sample results to help understand what the vineyard's resistance status is (sensitive, mixed or resistant) and how advisable it is to use the fungicide.
- Nancy will be conducting **PART 1**-a fungicide resistance testing project, (grape powder mildew, downy mildew, Botrytis) She is applying for a SCBG and has received letters of support from NJ wineries, OCPVA and GSWGA. **PART 2**- Early detection of pathogen and fungicide resistance so that growers can do the samples themselves.
- Nancy discussed additional projects on a national scale and is applying for grants in collaboration with other universities. One of these projects focuses on Sour Rot – What causes it? How can we manage it?

All these projects require legislative support, and Nancy is looking for letters of support for USDA grants and access to our vineyards. Please feel free to reach out to Nancy Sharma with any questions, additional details on these projects and to schedule a visit to your vineyard.

Nancy is also interested in learning more about the frost damage conditions and what vineyards are planning for disease management this year. How are the vineyards planning to protect the vines for next year?

Thank you Nancy!

Scott Donnini-Auburn Road Vineyards & Winery: Frost Damage Meeting Update w/Officials in Washington, DC

Scott discussed the trip to Washington, D.C. that he and Devon Perry(GSWGGA) took on May 4-5 as part of Wine America. Although the scheduled agenda focused on issues such as tariffs, fuel costs, the Farm Bill, and hemp regulations, they chose to focus their meetings with congressional offices on the recent devastating frost event that had severely damaged vineyards, as well as local apple and peach crops. They found that many congressional staff members had not yet heard about the extent of the damage, allowing them to be among the first to communicate its seriousness.

The group explained that specialty crops such as grapes do not have the same straightforward disaster assistance mechanisms available to many row crops. They presented preliminary survey data showing significant statewide losses and emphasized the need for USDA support and potential funding assistance. They also argued that the frost disaster reflects a broader pattern of increasingly frequent and severe weather events affecting agriculture.

They focused on observable facts, economic impacts, and the experiences of farmers believing that discussing real-world losses to vineyards and the broader agricultural economy would be more effective in encouraging cooperation between Democrats and Republicans. Scott felt this approach helped stimulate productive conversations among congressional offices and their staff.

Since returning, the association has continued gathering damage data and sharing it with elected officials. Scott encouraged growers and vineyard owners to contact members of Congress directly by phone or email, noting that repeated communication from affected constituents would help keep the issue visible. He stressed that if lawmakers hear consistent messages from growers across the industry, they will be more likely to recognize the severity of the situation and work together on potential solutions.

Thank you Scott!

Wine of the Evening- Fortified Wines (Red and White)

Thank you to the members who shared several example of their Fortified Wines including a 1982 Vintage Port compliments of Orley Ashenfelder and details on the making of their specific wine.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm