

Glenn McGourty
UC Davis Extension

Summary

Quality wine depends on quality fruit, and since the earliest of times, winemakers and wine drinkers have appreciated wines from sloping vineyards. An old Roman saying "Bacchus amat colle" (Bacchus, god of wine, loves hills) reinforces this idea. Nature does not give up its produce easily in many of these sites. Soils in upland areas often limit vine vegetative growth and crop size due to their diminished fertility and water holding capacities. The weather often is challenging in the spring; growth starts later than lower areas, and fruit ripens later in the fall. At higher elevations, luminosity and light intensity are stronger due to cleaner air and more ultraviolet light. Tending these vineyards can be problematic due to steep slopes and the potential for erosion, requiring specialized equipment and strategies to deal with tight spaces and hazardous surfaces. All of these factors can combine to make highly flavored and unique fruit, which in turn creates memorable wines. In this session, we will discuss some global perspectives on winegrowing in high elevation vineyards and how to bring out the quality potential from these sites.