

Common Courtesy

Common Courtesy, Common Sense

Background: Pete Opatz, former chairman of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, advises wine industry members to be aware, be involved and be courteous with their neighbors. "It's now considered common courtesy to explain your farming practices to your neighbors," Opatz said. "If you're not doing these things, you could become the next headline."

Challenge: "Walk a few steps in your neighbor's shoes," Opatz proposes. Engage in a little "vicultural therapy" to ease your neighbors' fears and increase their understanding and empathy. Let them know why, how, when and what you're doing.

Action: The Sonoma County Grape Growers Association developed a detailed plan for winegrape growers to communicate with their neighbors. It begins:

- Listen and respond to our neighbors.

- Use sound practices.

- Tell neighbors why our practices work.

Have a plan for working with neighbors. Reach out to them when they first move in — or you do. Touch base frequently, person-to-person. Meet on the front porch, in the kitchen, or at the mailbox. Listen to their concerns. Talk about wine and your passion for growing grapes. Inform them about your cultural practices and explain your commitment to sound practices. Share your philosophy, and why you're committed to sustaining the soil, preserving surrounding habitats, minimizing the need for pesticides, and maximizing quality.

Result: Growers and vintners are working with neighbors, building bridges, and earning support. "Our worst failure will be our silence," Opatz warns. "Get involved!"

