



Ten Questions with Lynn Diehl

Jim Stollberg—Maverick Farming Company



Santa Maria Valley native Jim Stollberg owns Maverick Farming Company (www.maverickfarming.com) and manages more than four hundred acres of local vineyards. Jim answered Ten Questions with Lynn Diehl this week.

Did you make any New Year's resolutions? If so, what are they?

This year I decided to get healthier and spend more time with my twin boys, now 3 ½ years old. The great thing about growing wine grapes is the flexible schedule, but for the last few years, flexible changed to long work days. This year I have focused my management on fewer, but more quality oriented vineyards which will maximize my work efficiency and gets me to the gym and home earlier at night.

What work takes place in the vineyards in January?

We began pruning on the 4th and are controlling weeds under the vines. Pruning is our most important operation during the year because we manipulate how the vines will grow and how many clusters each vine will produce. Attention to detail and good decisions can make the upcoming season much easier if the vines are pruned correctly.

How many acres do you manage?

I manage 440 acres between 4 ranches in the Santa Maria Valley.

How are the vineyards different? Or do they share some of the same characteristics given their proximity?

Every vineyard is different because of varieties/clones, row spacing, and trellis systems. I could go on and on. In my case working

specifically in the Santa Maria Valley, I have similar weather across all of my acreage.

What is the best part of your job?

I love being able to directly influence how and what attributes the wines have from the grapes I produce. Every winemaker is looking for something different in their wines and being able to discuss what I see in the grapes, which may get them to their goal, is a lot of fun. On the business side, I enjoy striving for very efficient vineyard operations and getting my guys in the field to buy into their important role in the whole process.

How do you foster a working relationship with winemakers so that the grapes reach their potential as wine? Do you have a favorite vintage/variety/label so far in your career?

I try to understand what the winemakers are looking for. The interesting thing is some winemakers are in the field at pruning and some show up the day of harvest. Both approaches can be successful as long as there is trust and knowledge between the grower and winemaker.

I have been most involved in Riverbench Vineyard's (www.riverbench.com) winemaking thus far in my career and enjoy the 2006 Estate Pinot Noir. The vineyard produces fruit forward, multi-layered Pinot Noir grapes from 35-year-old vines and the resulting wine is fun to drink.

You went to UC Davis – which is a terrific place for viticulture education – what didn't your degree prepare you for?

Everyday labor management was something I learned in the field following college. I knew the legal and logistical management of people, but the intangible relationship building and trust between management and the people who actually complete the many tasks was a surprise to me. I have learned that building these relationships and treating people with respect, whether they be in a suckering crew or a ranch foreman, makes everything we do more successful.

Do you taste the wine in barrels? I'm just wondering what you thought of this year's grapes. I have

tasted various Chardonnay and Pinot Noir barrels from the vineyards I manage and think, at this point, the Chardonnay may be a great one. The Pinot Noir was a little beat up during harvest with the strange weather and I think will begin to show its character better later this spring.

Do you make wine yourself?

I have tinkered with various varieties on small scales, but more for learning and fun than to produce a wine for sale.

What advice would you give someone who wants to go into vineyard management?

Be prepared to get your hands dirty because good management is being in the field seeing, touching, and smelling what is going on. My mentors are men who worked their way up from hands on experience. They put me through the same rigors and I am better for it. The second important piece of advice would be to expect to work every day. Farming and ranch management doesn't take too many weekends off, but the flexibility and results can be very rewarding. ♣



Lynn Diehl is the owner and host of Wine Region News Weekend TV- Sundays at 5 p.m. on KCOY CBS-12. The print version of "Ten Questions" may be edited for space considerations. The expanded

podcast is available online. www.wineregion-news.com.