



Featured California Winegrower: Ben Drake Temecula

Ben Drake has seen more sunrises than he cares to admit. But the affable fifth generation farmer isn't complaining.

Even as the sun begins to peak over the mountains that ring the Temecula Valley, Drake makes it a point to tell the passenger in his SUV about the benefits of low-impact, organic-style farming in the vineyard. "A lot of good wines are coming out of Temecula today," says the owner of a farm management company. He knows and loves grapes. And, he farms over 800 acres of avocados. It's an oasis in an urban sea of southern California.

If not for Drake's gently persistent efforts to let the world know about Pierce's Disease, a bacterial blight that nearly wiped out Temecula's wine industry five years ago, the vineyards might not be here today. Grassroots leadership. That's what it took. It helped create task forces, treatment programs, a comprehensive research agenda.

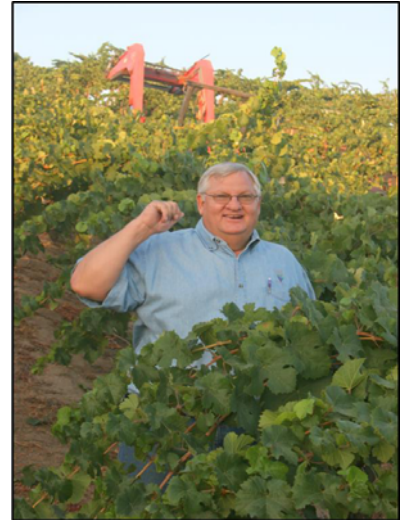
The disaster had a silver lining – the region rebounded with new vineyards, new trellising and hardier clones better suited to Temecula's warm days and cool nights.

"It gave us an opportunity to make improvements." Always looking at the silver lining. Along the way, Ben became a poster boy for the industry in Sacramento and Washington D.C.

As a former winery owner, Drake knows firsthand. Quality wine starts in the vineyard. He's proud of his role in upgrading farming practices in Temecula vineyards.

He savors life. Nothing better than sitting down to a medium-rare New York Strip and a glass of Zinfandel. When he's not tending the vineyard, Ben loves to fish. Especially fly fishing -- either fresh or salt water. "Half of it's the scenery," he says. "And I get chance to get away from everything."

He's raced high performance go-karts with his son. Now he's a grandfather. Taking life a little bit slower. Deeply committed to decomposed granite soil of Temecula -- and his family. Son-in-law, J.D., helps with the business. Son Chase is talking about going to ag school. Dreams of grandson Ethan enjoying Temecula sunrises – with grapes on the horizon. Made stronger because of passion. Commitment. Leadership.



Second Occupation: Senior VP Rancho California Water District Board of Directors

Education: Cal State Fresno

Passion: Fly fishing – fresh and saltwater

Favorite wine: Zinfandel

Life's little pleasures: Margaritas and Guacamole on a Friday afternoon