



Featured California Winegrower: Steve McIntyre Soledad

*"My passion is integrity—doing the right thing rather than the easy thing.
I don't think there is enough of it."*

Don't be too surprised if you hear the melodic strumming of a guitar coming from Monterey County winegrape producer Steve McIntyre's home. When—and IF—the affable grower finds a few moments to relax, he likes to reach for his guitar.

What's likely to emerge is an Eagles hit. Maybe "Hotel California" or "Tequila Sunrise." Or perhaps "One of These Nights." Steve likes to try some of the new sounds, too, but he freely admits that he's "stuck in the '70s."

For the next several weeks, though, Steve won't have much time for relaxation. Like his fellow winegrape growers up and down the state, it's time for the harvest. It's a time when the results of many months of hard work come to fruition.

"We currently farm just over 8,000 acres of winegrapes in Monterey County and an additional 100 acres of lemons," says Steve. "Our company, Monterey Pacific, Inc., is also a custom crush provider to other wineries."



A third-generation farmer, Steve hadn't always made agriculture his top choice for a career. He's got an undergraduate degree in music, but then he had an epiphany. "I figured out that I wasn't going to make any money playing music." It was reality-check time and Steve switched gears. He turned to winegrapes and before long he had his master's degree in enology from California State University, Fresno.

Successful farming—particularly the growing of premium winegrapes—requires a winning combination of cultural practices. Steve likes to do things organically and biodynamically whenever possible. The fewer things that are put on the vines the better.

He cites his cover-cropping program as an example. By delaying the mowing of the cover crop until late in the summer, he is able to create an atmosphere in the vineyard that is more favorable for the grape plants. The tall cover crop creates a microclimate that prevents troublesome weeds from germinating while at the same time creating a haven for beneficial insects.

Steve has an interesting perspective about growing winegrapes. "There's a cyclical nature to the crop that is akin to birth and death. Bud break is like emergence. And after harvest the plants don't die but they go dormant. Growing winegrapes appeals to my artistic and creative side, compared to growing many commodities."

When he's not working he likes to spend as much time as possible with his family—wife Kim, son Matt and daughters Kristin and Kassie. And he loves to fly his airplane. "Flying is an escape. You can't be doing anything else but flying. It's fun to take the family. We don't go far. Maybe up to Tahoe, to Oregon and maybe Phoenix. Any farther than that and I go commercial."

Favorite wine: Angelo Gaja Barbaresco from Italy
Food and wine combo: Pinot Noir and foie gras
Inside scoop: "I'm not as serious as most people think."
California's winegrape industry: "Fledgling, credible, interesting."