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VVA Names Grower of the Year

Shep Rouse Honored At 2022 Association Meeting

By Bob Garsson
Grape Press

Shepherd Rouse, owner of Rockbridge Vineyard and Brewery in Raphine, has been named Grower of the Year by the Virginia Vineyards Association (VVA).

The award was announced at the VVA's 2022 Technical Meeting in Charlottesville by Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matthew Lohr on May 12.

"For more than three decades, Shepherd has been one of the true pioneers of Virginia's wine industry," Secretary Lohr said in a taped presentation. "He started and expanded his vineyard, produced a number of award-winning wines and stands readily available to assist others in the wine and vineyard

industry."

Secretary Lohr also took note of the importance of the Virginia wine industry to the Commonwealth's economy.

"Virginia's wine industry is a tremendous asset for the Commonwealth as it contributes \$1.37 billion to the state's robust economy, while also creating more than 8,200 jobs," he said. "Virginia is also one of the most

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Reconnecting with colleagues, taking to the skies to elevate temperatures, and choosing GPS planting for a new vineyard.

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Grape pathologist Mizuho Nita details spray strategies to help guard against a variety of diseases at bloom.

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GETTING TECHNICAL



Photos by Chris Garsson, Bob Garsson & Tracy Kirkman



The VVA's 2022 Technical Meeting on May 12-13 featured a well-attended display and demonstration of vineyard equipment from several companies (hosted by Fernando Franco and Barbourville Vineyards) as well as industry and research updates, wine panel tastings and a wine reception all held at the Charlottesville Omni.

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REGIONAL REPORTS

► NORTHERN VA.

“The second- and third-year Albarino vines here look very good. They came through the winter in great shape and I’m hopeful for a small crop off of the third-year vines.”

By Dean Triplett

Greenstone Vineyard

Spring was supposed to have been here, but as I started to write this piece on April 18, it was snowing. At 2 p.m., it was 35 degrees outside. The week before at the same time, it was in the 70s. The forecast for the next Sunday called for temperatures in the 80s. Just another normal, crazy, early spring, I guess.

This past winter was pretty uneventful, all things considered. We did get a March 13th cold snap that saw temps drop to 16 degrees here, with two more cold events on the 28th and 29th with lows of 25 and 20 degrees, respectively. March as a whole was five degrees above average. It also featured lower rainfall than average with less than 1.5 inches.

April looked better, with a touch over 2 inches of rain, not including the event on the 18th. The temperatures for the month were just slightly above average. The good news is that even with the crazy swings in weather, most vineyards appear to be in good shape.

Jump ahead to May 6. All the pruning is done, and I’ve just put on my second spray of the season. My first was on April 26, one day behind last year. The vines have definitely taken off and look to be in good shape.

Along with the arrival of spring and the new growing season, life in general is returning to some sense of normalcy.

I was fortunate to attend the first Loudoun Wineries and Winegrowers Association meeting on April 6. This is the new organization formed from the merger of the old Loudoun Wineries Association and the Loudoun Wine Growers Association. While at the meeting I met up with Tremain Hatch, Virginia Tech research/extension associate, and asked him for his impressions of the vineyards he’s had the chance to observe. Here are his comments.

“It looks like we made it through the winter without deep cold temperatures to cause vine injury. We saw a couple of low temperature

episodes in January. But 8.5 degrees F is about the lowest I have seen east of the Blue Ridge. However, we did accumulate a handful of low temperature events below 15 degrees F to hopefully keep Pierces Disease symptom expression down.

“However, I have seen a couple of situations where vines planted last season were injured by the cold. I suspect that these vines were defoliated by downy mildew last fall, and then went into dormancy in a weak state, weak enough to see wood injury during our mild winter.

“For most early varieties budburst occurred around Easter weekend, but in the midst of sporadic periods of cool weather and warm weather. Most folks hit a threshold of 3-inch shoots with early varieties about the week of April 25 and applied a first fungicide application at that point. I will avoid making any pronouncements that we made it through spring frost season until mid-May, but at this point things look pretty good.”

I echo Tremain’s hesitancy to predict the end of frost events in our area. May 18 is the latest frost date that I’ve experienced here, and fortunately that held up this year. We made it through May without additional frost.

The second- and third-year Albarino vines here look very good. They came through the winter in great shape and I’m hopeful for a small crop off of the third-year vines. I’m normally leery of taking a crop off second-year vines so I’ll play that by ear. After last year’s lower than expected yields across my vineyard, I’m keeping my fingers crossed that I’ll have a closer to normal crop this year. The vines are showing plenty of flowers at this point. We’ll just have to see what bloom in June has in store for us.

I was able to attend the VVA’s Technical Meeting in Charlottesville on May 12-13. The meeting was well attended, especially considering that May is a busy time for growers. Besides the business portion of

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▶ NORTHERN VA. (cont.)

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the event, several topics were discussed. Fruit entomologist Doug Pfeiffer gave an overview of the general status of the spotted lanternfly. Grape pathologist Mizuho Nita gave talks on the Sentinel Vineyards project and also provided updates on downy mildew, ripe rot and sour rot. Several other speakers gave presentations on a wide range of topics.

Perhaps my two favorite sessions were the Tannat and Albarino tastings. Who doesn't love tasting wine? While there were differences, of course, between the wines, I was really impressed by the overall high quality of the wines presented.

But the highlight of the meeting for me was the opportunity to mingle with my fellow growers, chat with the vendors and especially to catch up with our very own Tony Wolf, who recently retired as Virginia's

viticulturist. Tony has meant so much to everyone in our industry and being able to see and talk to him, hopefully not for the last time, was an absolute delight.

I also have to give a great big thumbs up to VVA President Skip Causey for all the work he and everyone on the board did in putting this meeting together, especially considering it was without the assistance of Tony. It was no easy task to say the least.

I wish I had more pearls of wisdom to write about and can only say so far, so good. Replacement vines are in the ground, sprays are going on and it's back to work after another chilly grey winter. As with the coming of May flowers, hope and optimism spring eternal. Here's to a great vintage 2022.

Editor's Note: Dean Triplett is a regional reporter for Grape Press, covering Northern Virginia. We hope to feature more news about Northern Virginia's vineyards and

"May 18 is the latest frost date that I've experienced here, and fortunately that held up this year. We made it through May without additional frost."

wineries in future columns. Please contact Dean at gsvineyard13@gmail.com if you'd like to provide information for upcoming columns about growing conditions, new plantings or anything else you think would be of interest to other growers.

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► **SOUTHERN VA.** “... We are claiming success with this [helicopter] strategy.”

By Rachel Lagergren
Southern Regional reporter

Spring is here and the wind has not stopped. Steve VanSutphin at Chateau Morisette is busy pruning away up on the Blue Ridge Parkway. When I contacted him, he was behind schedule which may be stressful but isn't necessarily a bad thing.

“I am focused on not being in a hurry and staying just ahead of budbreak — delaying it as much as possible. We are removing the dead wood and laying down replacement cordons. We are renewing what we can. The nighttime temperatures are a concern. With the late-in-the-season freezes we've experienced these last couple of years, I am being as careful as possible.”

Kevin Sutherland of Nicewonder Farms was also challenged by the late arrival of winter this year. “We started out Jan. 1st with a high temperature of 76°F, then suddenly... it was winter. The temperatures cooled down within days and the wind hasn't stopped blowing. We completed pruning and training our block of Cabernet Franc in second leaf. Due to a very hard freeze at the end of April last year, we had to retrain more Chardonnay and Viognier in third and fourth leaf than we had anticipated.

“Work is progressing while keeping an eye on the budget, which is a priority. The cost of everything has increased by 15-20 percent.”

Kevin shared an update about a frost event that occurred on April 20. “The forecast was for temperatures at or below 32°F with calm winds,” he said. “The growth stage of the vineyard ranged from budbreak in the Petit Verdot to two or three leaves out in some of the Chardonnay and Viognier, and there was concern about a few frost-prone acres.”

Kevin said he decided to bring in a helicopter to fly over the vineyards, which would circulate any warmer air layered on top down to the vines. Temperature readings



Teresa Sutherland

A helicopter helps circulate warmer air down to the vines at Nicewonder Farms on April 20.

shown in the table below were taken at vine level in the lower and upper sections of the vineyard. Flight time was two hours beginning at 5 a.m. Temperatures in the lower vineyard rose two degrees within the first hour after the

Time	Temperature (°F)	
	Lower	Upper
05:00	26 - 29	33 - 34
06:00	28 - 31	33 - 35
06:30	32.4 - 33	33 - 34

helicopters started flying and continued to rise through the next hour and after 7 a.m.

“Looking through the vineyard the next day, we found only a couple of damaged shoots,” Kevin said. “In 2020 and 2021, we experienced hard freezes with temperatures dipping down to the low 20s. There was widespread damage to buds that were just starting to swell. So, this year, we are claiming success with this strategy. Here's to a more fruitful growing season!”

Editor's Note: Rachel Lagergren is a regional reporter for Grape Press, covering Southern Virginia. Please contact Rachel at lager0862@gmail.com if you'd like to provide information for upcoming columns about growing conditions, new plantings or anything else you think would be of interest to other growers.

► **EASTERN VA.** “I decided to go this route of outsourcing planting to a GPS planter ...”

By Gonzalo Ortiz
Rustic Vintage

Here in the eastern edge of the Northern Neck, we experienced light ground frost twice this spring, on the mornings of April 20th and 29th. These two events could potentially have affected growers with new plantings. I fall in that category, but thankfully we were not

affected. Still, I think it's important to take note of these two events for comparisons with other areas in the state that were affected with spring frost events this year.

April brought slightly under two-and-a-half inches of water to our area, which was beneficial to those of us who had just planted.

With respect to pests, I saw a handful of flea beetles feasting on the buds of some wild vines on our farm, which is more than I have seen in

my six years in Northern Virginia, but nothing compared to my many years in Pennsylvania where flea beetles are very common and almost always require control.

None of my planted vines had any flea beetles, and there were definitely not enough on the wild vines to motivate control. However, it got my attention as, again, they were not

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▶ EASTERN VA. (cont.)

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common for me in Northern Virginia. I was not surprised, however, given my experience in Virginia, to find that cutworms are abundant here.

In almost every aspect of what we do in the vineyard, there are multiple ways to accomplish the same thing. Case in point: planting.

If labor availability is an issue now, or likely to become one in the future, mechanical planting is a great alternative. Labor shortages have been a reality for many of us over many decades now, which is an important consideration when evaluating costs and values of different approaches.

When comparing one planting method with another, cost is one important consideration. But the value of knowing that all the plants will be in the ground in hours versus weeks is paramount when a large, reliable labor force is not available to assure that planting will be

done on time.

Training and explaining can be simple for some of us to do but we can't do any of that without workers to train. Once a grower is established more resources may become available. At that point, other alternatives with different types of risks might make sense. But when starting out, it is important to know that tasks will be done right and on time because issues in vineyards have a funny way of compounding quickly.

Adding precision to mechanical planting (a GPS or laser-guided planter) can help with future vineyard mechanization because the rows are uniformly straight. That becomes important in a number of tasks. For example, very straight rows would facilitate the use of a mechanical leaf remover since you would spend less time fighting with the tractor and implement to stay at the correct distance from the canopy. The uniformly straight row assures a more uniform leaf removal.

I decided to go this route of outsourcing planting to a GPS planter simply because, in less than two full workdays, I was able to have all my vines in the ground, freeing myself and my family to put in pencil rods and grow tubes.

On April 7 and 8, Benchmark Custom Vineyard Planting, Ovid, N.Y., effortlessly and professionally planted slightly more than 7,000 vines on our farm in less than two days. I had dealt with this company almost two decades ago and their professionalism and attention to detail has maintained at the highest level.

It took my family decades of work to get to this opportunity of being able to plant our own vineyard, and for Benchmark Custom's role in getting everything in the ground for me quickly I am very grateful.

***Editor's Note:** Gonzalo Ortiz is a regional reporter for Grape Press, covering Eastern Virginia. Please contact Gonzalo at eastvagrowers@gmail.com if you'd like to provide information for upcoming columns about growing conditions, new plantings or anything else you think would be of interest to other growers.*

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Grower of the Year: Shep Rouse

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dynamic wine-producing states in the U.S., with more than 28 varieties of grapes planted on more than 4,000 acres across the Commonwealth.”

Parker Slaybaugh, chief deputy secretary of agriculture and forestry, who introduced the video of Secretary Lohr and presented the award to Shep, said he had spent a good deal of time over the past 100 days talking to growers about current challenges, “from frosts and bad weather to high fuel and high fertilizer prices.”

“Fortunately, the wine industry is resilient,” he said. “You adapt and continue to adopt innovative ideas to create new opportunities that are helping you withstand these challenging times. I’m certain that the Virginia wine industry will continue to grow as people from all over the world discover Virginia wines and travel to our beautiful Commonwealth.”

Shep said his love for wine first developed when he was a college student traveling in Germany in 1974 and had the opportunity to sample that country’s Riesling wines. He became a big fan of sweet German wines but didn’t develop a taste for dry red wines until a second visit several years later.

After graduating from Washington & Lee University, Lexington, Va., with a degree in geology and biology, he returned to Germany on a Fulbright Scholarship and participated in the 1977 harvest in the Rheingau and Baden wine regions.

At the end of that stay, he visited a friend in Florence, Italy, and they had Chianti with their lunch every day. That exposure to red wine made a lasting impression on him, he said.

He moved to California in 1978 and spent eight years there working in vineyards and attending classes at the University of California, Davis where he earned a master’s degree in enology.

Returning to Virginia, Shep said he and his wife, co-owner Jane Millott-Rouse, found the perfect vineyard site in northern Rockbridge County. In 1989, he planted his first vines — five acres of Vidal grapes.

“Then I realized that if you’re going to buy a tractor and sprayer and all the other equipment you need, you’d better have enough vines to justify the cost,” he said.

He continued to expand the vineyard, and today his 17 acres are planted with seven different grape varieties complemented with fruit from other top-quality growers in



Parke Rouse

Grower of the Year Shep Rouse, owner of Rockbridge Vineyard & Brewery in Raphine, said his goal is to produce wines that please a broad range of individual tastes.

neighboring counties. His wines are made from vinifera grapes such as Chardonnay and Riesling, hybrids such as Chambourcin and Vidal, and native American grapes such as Concord. All told, Rockbridge produces about 6,000 cases of wine a year.

“Everyone in the Virginia wine and vineyard industry knows and respects Shep and what he does,” VVA President Skip Causey said. “I think the person who summed it up best is the woman who answered the phone when I called Shep at the winery. ‘He’s not here right now but I am sure he is in the vineyard,’ she said. ‘He is always in the vineyard.’”

“I chuckled because that’s who Shep is,” Skip added. “He keeps his head down and works hard in the vineyard and the winery to make some great wines.”

Shep said his goal is to produce wines that please a broad range of individual tastes,

explaining that his winemaking style of using traditional small-batch methods with minimal processing allows him to capture the essence of the vineyard in the glass.

Rockbridge wines have won numerous awards, including the Virginia Governor’s Cup on two occasions. His 2018 V d’Or dessert wine was honored this year with placement in the prestigious Virginia Governor’s Cup Case — the fourth time his wines have received that honor.

Rockbridge has also won Best in Show in the Atlantic Seaboard Wine Association Wine Competition and Best in Show in the Town Point Virginia Wine Competition.

Since 2005, the VVA has been pleased to honor one of its members with the annual Grower of the Year Award. Recipients are active participants in the Virginia viticulture community with a track record of commitment and service to the industry.



GROWER'S DATEBOOK

Highlighting events that may be of interest to members of the Virginia wine industry. For more info as well as registration details, click on each event. For more happenings, check out the VVA website.

► **The College of Food and Agricultural Sciences** at Ohio State University will conduct a webinar on Vineyard Mulching: Benefits Beyond Winter Protection from 1:30 to 4 p.m. on June 2. The webinar will provide an overview of vineyard mulching and share new research findings about its impact on vine health. Registration is required.

► **Virginia Cooperative Extension** will hold a virtual vineyard meeting June 16 at 1 p.m.

Did You Know?

► **Recordings of many** of the recent Eastern Viticulture and Enology Forum webinars are available on the Forum website. Topics covered include grapevine nutrition, advances in grape disease management and spring frost mitigation strategies.

Information listed here is current at the time of publication, but for all events, be sure to check directly with each organizer for the latest on any changes and/or cancellations.

Exploring a Plan to Establish An Equipment Cooperative

By **Jim Benefiel**
Benevino Vineyards

For those of you unable to attend the half-day demonstration of vineyard mechanization during the VVA's 2022 Technical Meeting, it was a well-organized show-and-tell of some useful implements. But if you did attend, perhaps you, like me, are still unable to justify such investments merely on the basis of cost savings. Perhaps the economic justification comes in the saving of a vintage that otherwise doesn't achieve maturity and suffers from pests for lack of labor. However, today's narrow margins severely limit acceptable cost increases.

To truly cost justify many of these implements may require substantially more than our median 6-acre vineyards. I now

farm 30 acres, growing soon to 40, and still can't quite sharpen my pencil enough for many of these investments.

If, however, I can find a few similar growers (say, 10 to 40 acres) not too far from my Northern Virginia location (say, less than a two-hour drive) for a task that is not particularly time sensitive and not astoundingly expensive, perhaps we can establish a cooperative to purchase and operate selected implements.

If you are willing to seriously discuss the pursuit of such possibilities, I have prepared some spreadsheets that outline what might be achievable under a shared arrangement. Details on funding, risk sharing, training, maintaining, scheduling, and repairing would need to be worked out.

If you're interested, send me an email: JWBenefiel@aol.com.

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Spray Strategies During Bloom

Grape Pathologist Reviews Available Tools To Help Prevent Infection

By Mizuho Nita

Grape Pathologist, Virginia Tech

Bloom is the start of the critical time for cluster infections by downy mildew, powdery mildew, black rot, Botrytis, and ripe rot, because pathogens of these diseases can infect flower parts. Symptoms may develop soon after infection (e.g., downy and powdery mildew) or close to harvest (e.g., Botrytis and ripe rot).

For downy mildew, black rot, and powdery mildew, grape clusters are susceptible to infection four to six weeks from bloom in the case of *Vitis vinifera* (i.e., European cultivars), and three to four weeks from bloom for *Vitis labrusca* varieties. That should translate into three to four sprays for *V. vinifera*, and two to three sprays for *V. labrusca*. If you have hybrids, they need to be protected for four to five weeks.

The best and most straightforward tactic is proper canopy management (i.e., shoot and leaf thinning and shoot tucking) and then protecting vines from infection by applying fungicides. It is much easier and more efficient in cost and environmental impact to protect your vines than trying to rescue diseased vines. Do not wait until you see diseases! I typically recommend maintaining a seven-to-ten day interval between sprays during the four-to-six week critical period.

Consider your specific situations (site, cultivar, history of diseases, recent weather, weather forecast, etc.) before deciding on spray materials and timing.

For example, when the environment has been dry for several weeks (e.g., central Va. in 2021), the risk of downy mildew and black rot will be low. On that note, please check my blog (<https://ext.grapepathology.org>) and NEWA (<https://newa.cornell.edu/>) for updates on weather and disease risks.

Below is the list of materials for key grape diseases. Please rotate modes of action (FRAC groups) and mix different FRAC groups if you use a material with its FRAC group starting with a number. This will help lower the risk of fungicide resistance, which is increasingly common among our vineyards. For example, we have widespread QoI (FRAC 11, e.g., Abound, Flint, etc.) fungicide resistance for powdery mildew, downy mildew, and Botrytis isolates in Va. Limit the use of a particular FRAC code to

twice a season. The only exception is the material with FRAC group starting with a letter “M.”

Powdery mildew: Sulfur (FRAC M2) is an economical option for powdery mildew prevention. Copper (FRAC M1) is also effective against powdery mildew, but I found the copper formulation I used was slightly less effective than sulfur. Other powdery mildew materials are: DMI fungicides (e.g., Rally, Elite, Mettle, Rhyme, Ceyva, etc, FRAC 3), Quintec (FRAC 13), Vivando (FRAC 50), Luna Experience (FRAC 7 + 3), Topguard EQ (FRAC 11 + 3), Aprovia (FRAC 7), Aprovia Top (FRAC 7 + 3), Miravis Prime (FRAC 7 + 12), Torino (FRAC U6), etc. Please make sure to rotate FRAC codes.

Downy mildew: Protective materials for downy mildew are: Mancozeb (FRAC M3) [Gavel has mancozeb + zoxamid (FRAC 22)], Captan (FRAC M4), Fixed copper (FRAC M1), Revus or Forum (FRAC 40), or Zampro (FRAC 40 + 45), or Ranman (FRAC 21). Note: There are increasing cases of Revus resistant to downy mildew isolates in Va. Plus, resistance to Ranman is known among downy mildew pathogens of other crops. Kickback materials are phosphonate (Phostrol, Prophyt, etc. FRAC P07) and Ridomil products (FRAC 4). Keep in mind that mancozeb has a 66-day PHI. You may need to stop using mancozeb before cluster closure with some early cultivars.

Black rot: Protective materials for black rot are: Mancozeb, QoI (FRAC 11, Abound, Flint, Pristine, Intuity, etc.), and DMI (FRAC 3, tebuconazole, Elite, Rally, Rhyme, etc.). Note: Captan and copper won't work against black rot. There is a concern about the fungicide resistance with FRAC 3 materials in N.Y. I have not seen the same trend in my vineyard, but if you feel your DMI material(s) does not provide reasonable control of black rot, please contact me (nita24@vt.edu).

Kick-back materials for downy mildew and black rot: We have materials with kickback activities against downy mildew (Ridomil products (FRAC 4), phosphite (FRAC P07, Prophyt, Phostrol, etc.) and black rot (myclobutanil (FRAC 3, DMI), etc.). They can be effective between infection

and establishment of the pathogen (i.e., you should spray within 3-4 days after the rain). We do not have a so-called “eradicant” that can kill already established pathogens. Infection on flowers and young fruits can happen very fast. Thus, it is better to protect the vines rather than relying on the kick-back action.

Botrytis: The development of Botrytis depends on varieties and canopy management strategies. White-fruited varieties with tight cluster architecture tend to be more prone to Botrytis. A red-fruited variety with loose clusters probably has fewer issues with Botrytis, if the canopy is well maintained.

Bloom protection is vital for Botrytis management because this fungus can infect flowers and flower debris, and symptoms develop later when berries are maturing. Botrytis materials are: Rovral and Meteor (FRAC 2), Elevate (FRAC 17), Vanguard and Scala (FRAC 9), Luna Experience (FRAC 7+3), Kenja (FRAC 7), Miravis Prime (FRAC 7 + 12) Switch (FRAC 9 + 12), etc. As with powdery mildew, QoI fungicides are no longer the best material for us due to the development of QoI-resistant Botrytis isolates throughout Va.

Ripe rot: Mancozeb, ziram (FRAC M3), captan (FRAC M4), and QoI (Strobilurin, FRAC 11) fungicides are currently recommended. But due to the 66-day PHI of mancozeb, you may not have enough days remaining to spray mancozeb later in the season. Based on our lab and field tests, mancozeb, captan, copper (FRAC M1), tebuconazole (FRAC 3), azoxystrobin (FRAC 11), and Switch (FRAC 9 + 12) provided some level of efficacy against ripe rot pathogens.

However, none of the products offered a sufficient degree of control. Also, some of the isolates causing ripe rot are not sensitive to some materials.

Thus, when it comes to ripe rot management, please think of a rotation of modes of action and a tank mix of at least two modes of action. The timing of the application will be similar to that of Botrytis: bloom, bunch closure, and veraison. If you have cultivars that will be left on vines for an extended period after veraison, it is probably a good idea to apply one more spray two weeks after veraison.