



History

Founded in 1983 as the Cloverdale Citrus Fair Wine Competition, the event has evolved over the years, broadening its base to a greater number of wine regions. In 2000 it was renamed the California North Coast Wine Competition. In partnership with *The San Francisco Chronicle*, the event is now called The Chronicle Northern California Wine Competition. Wines bottled in or made from grapes grown in all northern California counties, from Monterey to the Oregon border and east to the Sierra foothills, qualify for the 2001 competition.

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Established in 1892, the Cloverdale Citrus Fair is one of the oldest municipal fairs in California. It takes place every President's Day weekend, giving it the distinction of being the first fair of the calendar year.

The Cloverdale Citrus Fair is located in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley, one of the finest wine regions in the world.

In 1982, two wine industry insiders sat down over a glass of zinfandel and laid plans for the first Cloverdale Citrus Fair Wine Competition the following year. Fair Board Members Bob Del Sarto of Italian Swiss Colony and Bob Bogner of Allied Grape Growers conceived the competition to fulfill the needs of the burgeoning wine industry in northern Sonoma and southern Mendocino Counties.

Del Sarto and Bogner considered Cloverdale to be the hub of surrounding growing regions in northern Sonoma County, Mendocino County including Anderson Valley and Hopland, and Lake County including Guenoc Valley. They drew the competition's boundaries to include all wineries within a twenty-mile radius of the fairgrounds.

The first competition was modest in size — 15 wineries entered 45 wines, and a single panel of five judges awarded 30 medals. Invited judges included winemakers Dick Arrowood, John Parducci, Robert Keeble and Mike Lee, wine writer Millie Howie, and wine marketer Joe Vercelli.

The event was growing in size and scope and the Citrus Fair Board realized they needed professional help. They turned to Bob Fraser, current chair of Santa Rosa Junior College's Agriculture and Natural Resources Department. Fraser implemented the "West Coast style" of professional wine judging used by colleague Rich Thomas, coordinator of the Sonoma County Harvest Fair's first wine competition. This system employs five-member panels consisting of a winemaker, a wine retailer or marketer, a wine writer, a wine educator and a culinary or tourism professional.

The competition rapidly grew in the 1990s to over 100 wineries. Eligibility was gradually increased to include all wineries in Sonoma, Mendocino and Lake Counties. Consequently, it was renamed the Tri-County Wine Competition from 1996–99. The competition expanded to the entire North Coast Appellation in 2000 as the California North Coast Wine Competition. This area included all wineries in the counties of Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Lake, Solano and Marin.

Now sponsored by *The San Francisco Chronicle*, the competition unveils a new title and extends its territory to all northern California wine regions.