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Vineyard Grows Veggies in Paso

Volunteers plant produce at Steinbeck Vineyards to feed the hungry

by [Jane Firstenfeld](#)



*Jacqueline Madlem, Paco Arrowsmith, Pamela and Crystal Arrowsmith plant seedlings at the Steinbeck garden.
PHOTO: Richard Baker, richardbakerphoto.com.*

Paso Robles, Calif. -- A long-established Paso Robles vineyard is teaming with the international Urban Farming organization to launch a pilot program dubbed Vineyards Growing Veggies. An expansion of Urban Farming's campaign, INCLUDE FOOD, which encourages property owners to plant fruit and vegetables when landscaping, the new program is taking root in a 1-acre plot adjacent to the family home at [Steinbeck Vineyards & Winery](#).

Last Saturday, May 31, about 30 volunteers gathered to plant seeds and seedlings donated by local nurseries and farm supply companies. Within six to seven weeks, the volunteer corps will begin to harvest produce including: tomatoes, peppers, squash, melon and cucumbers and herbs. Another work party is planned for next weekend, when the remaining half-acre will be planted on the plot formerly tended by members of the Steinbeck family (no relation to the author).

The family has been farming the land since 1943. Cindy Steinbeck Newkirk told *Wines & Vines*



Tim and Cindy Newkirk at Steinbeck

that she'd been gardening the acre herself, and donating much of the produce to local food banks and families in need, but that inevitably, some food went to waste. Now, with a schedule of volunteers to tend and distribute the crops, and cooperation from local food organizations, all the food will find hungry mouths to feed.

Newkirk is unphased by the prospect of dozens of strangers tramping through her front-yard garden. "Our family has always been very hospitality oriented," she said. "This is a way to give back to the community." She noted that the garden space, although near the vineyards, is not suited for grapegrowing because of underground piping. Steinbeck Vineyards is donating irrigation water and lending the land and necessary farming implements to the project. Newkirk says that the garden and the comings-and-goings of volunteers will not impact vineyard operations.

Newkirk was inspired to enlist in the project about six months ago, during a conversation at a wine bar with her longtime friend, Kathy Kelly. Kelly, who produces the Winery Music Awards (winerymusicawards.com), had met Urban Farming founder Taja Sevelle at the awards' finale in Paso Robles last summer, and begun brainstorming on ways to collaborate. The idea of Vineyards Growing Veggies germinated, and has now grown to include the Paso chapter of Backyard Harvest, which harvests and distributes locally grown food products; and the San Luis Obispo County Food Bank, which will make sure the food gets to those who need it.

Kelly reported that the fertile patch of land at Steinbeck will yield 6-7 tons of food per season: about 1 pound each of fresh, organic produce for 12,000 people. Even better, Paso's clement climate will permit three complete crop rotations every year. Newkirk explained that, once the first plantings are finished bearing in 10 to 12 weeks, fall crops will go in; during the winter, potatoes can grow on the plot.

"Families that come and volunteer get as much food as they can use," Newkirk said. "Then, the remaining produce is delivered to shelters." Food production will be maximized by the participation of master gardener Melany Blankenship, owner of Nature's Touch Nursery & Harvest in Templeton, who will share her knowledge of organic growing with the volunteer crews.

Newkirk's father Howie Steinbeck and his wife Bev first planted winegrapes on the property in 1982; they'd purchased the acreage from Steinbeck's maternal grandfather in 1972. Steinbeck now owns 500 acres of premium winegrapes, and Howie manages another 500 acres of Paso



Vineyard owner Howie Steinbeck installs irrigation pipes for the new vegetable garden.

*PHOTO: Richard Baker,
richardbakerphoto.com.*

Robles vineyards. Among wineries sourcing grapes from Steinbeck are [Treana](#), [J. Lohr](#), [Arroyo Robles](#), [Eagle Castle](#), [Castoro](#), [Eberle](#), [Meridian](#), [Peachy Canyon](#) and [San Antonio](#).

The family has begun producing wine at a nearby custom-crush facility, with winemaker Steve Glossner, formerly of [Justin](#) and Adelaide. "This year we have a very small amount of Cabernet Sauvignon and Viognier," Newkirk said. "We are hoping to produce about 1,000 cases." The wine will be showcased at yet another Newkirk project, The WineYard at Steinbeck Vineyards, which she describes as "a wine education vineyard and classroom," a vino-tourism project that brings visitors into the vineyard. (Learn more at thewineyard.com.)

Kelly and Newkirk are both hopeful that Vineyards Growing Veggies at Steinbeck will be just the first of many similar efforts throughout California and the world. "We want it to go international," Newkirk said. For more information, e-mail Kelly at kathy@winerymusicawards.com or visit urbanfarming.org.

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