

## Wine Country for Restaurants

*California Wineries Step Forward to Help the Beleaguered Restaurant Industry*

By **Mark Spivak** - April 17, 2020



As everyone knows, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread damage to the economy on both a local and national level. The restaurant industry has been particularly hard hit. According to the National Restaurant Association, 3% of the nation's restaurants closed permanently before April 1; they project another 11% will shutter by the end of this month, with even greater losses if the current lockdown continues into May.

Restaurant workers have suffered greatly: most have no health insurance or other benefits, and many survive on tips. Despite the administration's efforts to extend unemployment insurance payments to gig economy workers, the process of applying for those payments has been complicated and difficult.

California's leading wineries have jumped in to help by supporting the Restaurant Workers' Community Foundation COVID-19 Relief Fund. The RWCF has partnered with Winebid, an online auction platform, to sell large-format and rare bottles donated by the wineries. All revenue from the sales (minus Winebid's 9% fee for handling inventory, processing and fulfillment) goes directly to the charity. Half the money is earmarked for relief to restaurant workers; 25% goes to non-profits serving workers in crisis, and the other 25% is channeled into zero-interest loans to help restaurants reopen and get back on their feet.



The roll call of participating wineries is impressive. Cult labels such as Bond, Promontory, Staglin, Harlan and Screaming Eagle are represented, along with high-profile brands such as Quintessa, Inglenook and Lail. The weekly online auction runs from 7:15 p.m. Pacific Time Sunday to 7 p.m. Pacific time the following Sunday. Prospective bidders only need to register on Winebid and click on the auction labeled "86 Lost Wages."

Since March 23, the initiative has raised \$1,250,000. Funds are being distributed through Southern Smoke, a crisis relief organization based in Houston (although the scope of the relief effort is nationwide). Workers who have been affected by the pandemic can apply for assistance at

<https://form.southernsmoke.org/smoke/application/>

If you're a wine enthusiast or collector looking to expand your cellar and contribute to a good cause at the same time, log on to Winebid and do your part.

