

WORK & PURPOSE

How to Volunteer at a Vineyard or Winery This Fall

Helping out at harvest time comes with plenty of tasty perks

- By [Judy Colbert](#)

September 5, 2019



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In the classic *I Love Lucy* episode, [Lucy's Italian Movie](#), Lucille Ball brought her audience to tears of laughter as she stomped grapes while visiting a winery. Well, grape-stomping hasn't been allowed as part of the wine production process in the U.S. since late in the 20th century, but you can have other types of fun volunteering at vineyards and wineries during harvest time at a vineyard in America this fall.

When you show up, you'll be asked to do anything from helping with the harvest to pouring wine samples in the tasting room. For your efforts, you may receive a winery shirt, free or discounted wine, invitations to private events or even a free meal.

Below are a few vineyards and [wineries across the country](#) that take volunteers. You can find others by doing an online search: Type in the state you're interested in, a winery you like there and the word "volunteer" or "volunteering."

In the East

On the Eastern Shore of Maryland, [Crow Vineyard & Winery](#) in Kennedyville grows Vidal Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Barbera, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc grapes. Co-owner Judy Crow says her business uses 30 to 50 volunteers to harvest and sort grapes in September and October. "We request that you work in three-hour blocks, be able to lift twenty-five pounds and bend and stand," she said. In exchange, you'll get either a meal, some of Crow's grass-fed Angus beef, or wine as a thank you.

The volunteers, known as 'Good Luck Charms' also serve as ambassadors at offsite festivals and events the winery participates in, helping with set-up, serving, selling and tear down.

This vineyard and winery will also need volunteers for its Run the Vineyards-Crow Vineyard 5K race Sept. 21, to help with race check-in, finish-line giveaways, water stations and award ceremony. You're invited to the join the after-party along with musicians and wine.

[Barrel Oak Winery](#), in Delaplane, Va. (part of the Piedmont), grows Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Viognier, Norton, Cabernet Franc, Vidal Blanc, Chambourcin, Traminette and Seyval Blanc, producing wine from their grapes, plus Syrah, Merlot and Albarino wines. Co-owner Brian Roeder says Barrel Oak uses volunteers during the bottling process — as many as a dozen at a time — in exchange for wine samples.

Another Virginia winery, [Good Luck Cellars](#) in Kilmarnock, is one of seven on the [Chesapeake Bay Wine Trail](#) which encompasses the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula of Virginia. Good Luck Cellars is a community-based vineyard on the site of an old sand-and-gravel mine that looks for 'Good Luck Charms' (as the winery calls its volunteers) year-round.



Picking grapes at Crow Vineyards and Winery in Maryland

Its volunteers help harvest 25 acres of grapes in late summer and fall, prune during the winter months and spring's budburst and do suckering (removing unnecessary shoots) and leaf thinning before the harvest cycle starts again. Volunteers also help with the bottling process a few times during the year. Good Luck Charms also serve as ambassadors at offsite festivals and events the winery participates in, helping with set-up, serving, selling and tear down. In exchange, they get free admission to the events and lots of estate-grown "good luck"(wine!).

More than 120 volunteers are used just about all year at [Stonefield Cellars Winery](#) in Stokesdale, N.C., — near the Piedmont Triad of Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem — with assistance harvesting, crushing, pressing and bottling. They're part of the "Will Work for Wine" program, where volunteers at a winemaking event are fed lunch or dinner or take home a bottle of wine. Festival workers generally receive three bottles per day; harvesters get two per shift. The winery grows 12 varietals of American, European and hybrids. All its wines are made from Stonefield Cellars' grapes or others grown in North Carolina, producing dry whites, dry reds, semi-sweet and sweet wines.

In the West

In Gaviota, Calif., behind the coastal mountains of Santa Barbara County and south of Solvang and Buellton, [Folded Hills Winery](#) grows Rhone varietals that produce organic and biodynamical wines. Folded Hills uses volunteers to: help with special events; work with the friendly animals (it's a farmstead and ranch with Clydesdales, zebras, camels, llama, KuneKune

pigs and a mini Jersey cow); welcome guests, bus tables and wash and polish glassware in the tasting room and work at its organic vegetable stand on weekends. In exchange, you receive a gift card for a meal at your favorite spots.

[Carlson Creek Vineyards](#), one of the largest in Arizona, is located in southeastern Willcox with tasting rooms in Willcox, Scottsdale and Cottonwood. Members of its free Wine Society are invited to volunteer during the pruning, harvest and at events. (The members also get quarterly, discounted home deliveries of Carlson Creek wines and invitations to exclusive events and complimentary tastings.) Note: harvest days normally start at about 5:30 a.m. Afterwards, lunch and wine are provided. As a bonus, the co-owners and winemakers are always in attendance, so it's an opportunity to get one-on-one time with them.

In the Midwest

[Fenn Valley Vineyards](#), a family-owned winery in Fennville, Mich., offers its volunteers shirts, discounts on wine and events, training on wine and service of alcohol, and invitations to volunteer-only events. The Fenn Valley volunteers are used for new-release weekends, fall weekends and the Vine Wine'd 5K race Oct. 19 as well as the Fenn Valley Festival in June, summer evening cookouts, a chili cook-off in January and other events. In addition to whites, sparkling wines, reds and ice wine, Fenn Valley produces fruit wines (cherry, blueberry and sometimes raspberry).

Finally, though the [von Stiehl Winery](#) in Algoma, Wisc., doesn't use volunteers, you can attend its annual [Wet Whistle Wine Fest](#), which will be held Sept. 13 and 14 this year and feature wine tastings, heritage foods, fine art, tours, live music and grape stomping and people dressed — Lucy-like— in winery-appropriate costumes.

By [Judy Colbert](#)

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