

**Fall-Winter 2000-2001**

**CONFESSIONS OF A DIRT FARMER**

SIX MONTHS AGO, ALMOST TO THE DAY, my son Reilly and I were sitting in the dirt behind the homeplate screen watching the last playoff game of his baseball season. I was sitting on a five-gallon bucket and Reilly was literally sitting in a pile of dirt. Not only was he sitting in it he was also scooping it up and pouring it all over himself and occasionally over me. It had been a great season!

At some point a friend walked by and commented on Reilly's affinity for dirt and I said, "He's a true son of a farmer!" To which Reilly replied, "Dad, I don't want to be a farmer." "Why not?" I asked. To which he quickly and emphatically said, "Because farmers are poor!"

How on earth did he get this impression; has he been reading my newsletter?

Three months later, I'm standing in the dirt at the base of our 22-acre two-year-old cabernet vineyard wondering if the entire vineyard is going to die. It seems that most of the vines have some type of mysterious ugly, swollen, growth at the base of the vine just above the bench-graft. Most of the vines look badly dehydrated and the leaves are displaying colors that are not generally associated with good health.

We call in experts, we send samples to agricultural labs. No one seems to know what we have. We are special. We are "Farmers." Be afraid my son, be very afraid!

Harvest has come and gone now and we did get our first small crop off the new cab vineyard, not as much fruit as we had hoped, but fruit nonetheless. Most of the vines have miraculously survived and so far the 2000 juice tastes damn good. Can't wait till next year!

--Michael Keenan