

# Longtime Fresno County farmer Ron Metzler dies at 78

By Robert Rodriguez  
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Ron Metzler, a pioneering Fresno County farmer and staunch Fresno State supporter, died on Nov. 24. He was 78.

Mr. Metzler, who had moved to Arizona several years ago, lost his battle with ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

He is fondly remembered for being an innovator and agriculture trailblazer. A Sanger native, Mr. Metzler and his brother, Dennis, farmed stone fruit, table and wine grapes, citrus, almonds and walnuts. The Metzlers are credited for introducing the Granny Smith apple to the San Joaquin Valley.

At one time, the family had apples planted from Madera County to Kern County. He also developed a packing and marketing operation under the SunMet brand and helped found Metzler Family Farms.

Friends and industry officials said Mr. Metzler never was satisfied with the status quo. If there was a better way to grow a crop, or harvest it, he would try to make it happen. He experimented with mechanical pruning and harvesting of grapevines at a time when everyone else was doing it by hand.

Nat DiBudo, president of Allied Grape Growers in Fresno, said Mr. Metzler was one of his mentors. During the mid-1980s when DiBudo was working as a consultant, Mr. Metzler was one of his clients.

"I learned as much from him as he learned from me," DiBudo said. "His love and commitment for agriculture showed in everything he did. He is definitely someone who has had a significant impact on the agriculture industry in California and the San Joaquin Valley."

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Nat DiBudo, president of Allied Grape Growers in Fresno

Mr. Metzler's drive for success led him to take leadership positions in many organizations, including being executive director of the California Association of Winegrape Growers, president of the Advisory Board of Viticulture and Enology Research Center at Fresno State, and president of Sanger Farm Bureau.

He also was a founding member of the wine grape association and Ag One at Fresno State. And he was a member of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, International Apple Institute, California Tree Fruit Agreement and Fresno State Agriculture Foundation.

A Fresno State Bulldog through and through, Mr. Metzler was instrumental in the Bulldog Foundation, serving as president from 1977 to 1979. During his college years, Mr. Metzler was on the Fresno State track team as a shot putter.

Pat Ogle, former executive director of the Bulldog Foundation, a fundraising group, said Mr. Metzler cared deeply about the college's athletic programs. Like many die-hard Bulldogs, he wanted to see the college compete on a larger scale. He worked tirelessly to help raise funds for the athletic department.

Ogle described him as a dreamer who liked to visualize the possibilities of what could be.

"Then he would say that is enough dreaming," Ogle said. "Let's make this a reality."

Diadre, his wife of 28 years, said Mr. Metzler's parents, Henry and Edna Metzler, were extremely supportive of Fresno State and set the example for Mr. Metzler to follow.

"They were a really good example of people who gave back to the community, and Ron did that as well," she said.

But it wasn't just large institutions that Mr. Metzler supported. On the farm, he would work alongside his workers. He pruned, drove a tractor and did anything else that needed to be taken care of.

"He had lots of personal relationships with the workers and their families," she said. "And if they ever needed a few extra bucks, he would do that. He was a warmhearted man."

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Ronald Henry Metzler

Born: May 6, 1937

Died: Nov. 24, 2015

Occupation: Farmer

Survivors: Wife Diadre; sons Eric, Ryan and Michael; and daughter Tracy; their spouses; seven grandchildren; and brother Dennis.

Services: A Celebration of Life will be held at the School of Viticulture and Enology, overlooking the vines at Fresno State on March 12, 2016, at 2 p.m. Bulldog red will be appropriate attire.