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## AS MERITAGE POPULARITY SOARS, LARGER WINE PRODUCERS JOIN THE MOVEMENT

**Healdsburg, CA, Thursday, January 22, 2009**— While it may not yet be officially sanctioned as a word by Webster’s Dictionary, the growing popularity of Meritage and other blended wines has some of the nation’s largest wine companies clamoring to use the word on their labels.

The Meritage Association has announced that Costco, Robert Mondavi Private Selection and Sterling Vineyards have recently joined the trade association, which promotes Meritage wines and polices usage of the trademarked term. All have released new Meritage wines into the marketplace over the last six months.

“Meritage and other blended wines are now the second fastest growing wine category,” explained Meritage Association Chairman Kim Stare Wallace of Dry Creek Vineyard, citing a recent Nielsen market study. “People love blended wines because they are easily accessible when they’re young, but still have great aging potential if you prefer to cellar them. You get the best of both worlds.”

The only other wine category to experience faster growth than Meritage is Pinot Noir, which has been the darling of the wine world since the release of the cult movie “Sideways” back in 2004.

Meritage wines are those blended in the tradition of Bordeaux. Red Meritage is a blend of any of five varietals — Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Merlot or Malbec. A White Meritage is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. According to the association’s bylaws, no single varietal component can make up more than 90% of the blend.

The Meritage Association, which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, now has more than 220 members in 22 states and six other countries, including Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Israel and Mexico. For more information, go to [www.meritagewine.org](http://www.meritagewine.org).