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News Release

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Honoring the Life and Legacy of Domenick "Cookie" Bianco

Industry pioneer and founding commissioner leaves an enduring legacy of leadership and service

Fresno, CA – The California Table Grape Commission (commission) joins growers, families, and friends throughout the California table grape industry in mourning the passing of Domenick "Cookie" Bianco, who died November 6. A pioneering grower and founding father of the commission, Cookie leaves a legacy woven into the history of California table grapes and the lives of the people who grow them.

For more than seven decades, Cookie's life unfolded alongside the growth of the California table grape industry. His story reflected the determination of farming families who built businesses from the ground up, persevered through hardship, and worked to leave something stronger for the next generation. He understood what it took to grow a crop, build a market, and hold an industry together. He devoted his life to all three.

Cookie began working in the grape industry in 1950 at just 15 years old, following in the footsteps of his father, an Italian immigrant who built a successful grape business. After overcoming significant business challenges, Cookie, his brother Bobby, and his wife Edith worked together to rebuild, ultimately establishing Anthony Vineyards, named in his father's honor. What began as a small vineyard grew into a diversified agricultural business with operations extending beyond California.

That experience shaped his conviction that the industry's future depended on growers working together. A founding member of the commission's first board in 1968, Cookie served for two years before returning in 1989 and fulfilling 40 years of service. As a commissioner and former chairman, he helped guide the organization through defining challenges, including legal battles that threatened growers' ability to collectively promote their crop. His commitment to the commission reflected his conviction that every California table grape grower had a stake in its success.

"Cookie's life is inseparable from the story of California table grapes," said Ian LeMay, commission president. "He understood the sacrifice behind every vineyard, the pride families

take in their harvest, and the responsibility each generation carries to prepare the next. He helped build this industry and never stopped believing in what its people could accomplish together. Those who grew up alongside him and learned from him now carry that example forward. His passing is a deeply personal loss felt across our entire industry.”

Over his remarkable career, Cookie helped build California table grapes into a globally recognized industry. Through changing markets, evolving consumer preferences, and difficult seasons, he remained steadfast in his belief in collective effort. Reflecting on his career in a 2022 interview, he said, “Nobody could be an island by themselves and be successful.”

His respect for the people who made the industry possible extended well beyond the boardroom. Cookie held a deep appreciation for farmworkers and their contributions, and he took pride in seeing their children pursue education and new opportunities. “We couldn’t do it without them. I praise them all the time,” he said.

His extraordinary service earned recognition across California agriculture. In 2018, the California Department of Food and Agriculture honored him with a proclamation recognizing his decades of dedication. In 2024, the commission and California Fresh Fruit Association presented him with their first-ever joint Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing his pioneering spirit, leadership, perseverance, and contributions to the industry.

At the center of his life was his family, particularly his wife, Edith, whom he credited as his greatest source of strength. His warmth, stories, quick wit, and unmistakable personality forged friendships that spanned generations.

The commission extends its heartfelt condolences to the Bianco family, the Anthony Vineyards team, and all who knew and loved Cookie.

His legacy is rooted in the vineyards he helped build, the commission he helped establish, and the generations of people who will continue the work to which he gave so much of himself.

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