



**Wine Institute**  
the voice for california wine

# Sustainable Winegrowing Practices

June 2002

## Highlight of the Month: Communicating with Neighbors and the Community

*Building positive relationships with neighbors and the community requires honest, proactive interactions that will help build trust and understanding of the winegrowers' role in the community. Good relations can increase cooperation, raise awareness of issues and diverse views, and also improve business opportunities.*

### Wente's Effort for Agriculture in Community Planning

Over a decade ago, the Wente family began to see urban growth and vineyard expansion rapidly converging near their winery in Livermore, a small community near the heavily populated south bay of the San Francisco Bay Area.

"We realized that we faced potential build out of the Livermore Valley and

adjacent cities in our lifetime," says Phil Wente, executive vice president of Wente Vineyards. "It became a survival issue for us and we considered moving our winery near our Monterey vineyards. City plans at the time did not address agriculture, and urbanization and housing developments seemed to be a foregone conclusion. We

approached city officials about the need for work on major regional planning issues and also to see if the community wanted agriculture as part of the plan."

What resulted were a series of meetings bringing together hundreds of people to discuss ideas and develop a "smart growth" plan for the region. The sessions were attended by residents,

farmers, business people, environmental activists and public officials. Major corporations participated and gave financial support for the planning process because of their interest in employee retention issues that involved assuring the existence of communities offering a desirable lifestyle.

The work also attracted funds from foundations interested in open space issues.

"People wanted individual cities with character rather than urban sprawl, and they considered agriculture a buffer for maintaining open space and contributing to the quality of life," explained Wente. "They wanted diversified communities with strong social fabric, strong educational systems, and parks and trails for recreation. The agricultural and urban communities came together and planned what we call a 'working landscape.'"

"The benefit to us was creating an environment in which Livermore's 23 wineries and 4,000 acres of vineyards could thrive. Our wineries are a lifestyle industry, and we wanted a healthy, flourishing community that would have the economic prosperity to enjoy our industry. The interaction between business and the local forces allowed us to realize how much our residents enjoy and value us," says Wente.



Booming expansion of vineyards and housing developments in Livermore Valley led Wente Vineyards to work with the community to plan "smart growth" for agricultural and urban areas.

Please share this newsletter with your entire staff. It is also available online in pdf format on Wine Institute's web site at: [www.wineinstitute.org/communications/highlight/NeighborsJune2002.pdf](http://www.wineinstitute.org/communications/highlight/NeighborsJune2002.pdf)

**Benefits of Establishing Good Relations with Neighbors and Communities:**

- ⌘ *Helps raise credibility and increases the public's trust in winegrowers on environmental and social questions*
- ⌘ *Enhances knowledge on policy matters and broadens understanding of diverse points of view*
- ⌘ *Can help identify common ground and mutual goals*
- ⌘ *Leads to better informed input and can produce more creative and constructive solutions*
- ⌘ *Can increase cooperation and build support from the community, government officials and environmental leaders*
- ⌘ *Keeps lines of communication open and starts a dialogue before a problem emerges, thus preventing unanticipated conflict*
- ⌘ *Provides opportunities for networking*
- ⌘ *Improves business opportunities through stakeholder involvement on environmental issues*

*(Information on benefits is partially drawn from "The Winegrape Guidebook for Establishing Good Neighbor and Community Relations," published by CAWG.)*

**Potential Trade-offs:**

- ⌘ *Requires an investment of time establishing relationships with no guarantee of cooperation or support*
- ⌘ *Could involve some expenditures producing brochures or other communication materials*

**Good Neighbor Relations at Woodside Vineyards**

Since 1960, Bob Mullen of Woodside Vineyards has been growing grapes and producing wine in the prosperous Woodside community that surrounds his small family winery. Located 30 miles south of metro San Francisco, the suburban town is home to celebrities and many power people working in the city and in nearby Silicon Valley. These residents are like most citizens in that they value peace and quiet in their neighborhood of redwood trees and rolling coastal hills.

"We haven't had any complaints about our farming operations since we've been here," says Mullen, who has neighborhood homes bordering every side of his estate vineyards. "A lot of it is simple common courtesy in notifying neighbors about our practices, such as when we will be dusting sulfur, spraying, or running a tractor." Mullen says they also don't start vineyard operations before 8 a.m. and conserve water so as not to adversely affect water levels in

neighboring wells. They prevent any problems by keeping the lines of communication open and getting people involved with their winery.

One way Woodside Vineyards reaches out to neighbors and the community is an annual invitation to help with the winery's

harvest and wine tasting. "The volunteers love getting their hands in the dirt because they are in a business environment all day." The event ends with Woodside Vineyards giving its harvest workers a barbecue, bottles of wine and commemorative t-shirts.

"Of course the event is for marketing and public relations, but, more importantly, it helps build relationships and increases understanding and empathy for what we are doing," says Mullen.

discovered that his winery had much support and appreciation in the Woodside community. Many neighbors wanted to have their own vineyard on their estates. Mullen and winemaker Brian Caselden soon developed a thriving business managing acreage and harvesting grapes for their wines from 23 local vineyards. Mullen turns down offers monthly from community members who want him to plant a home vineyard.

"The neighbors are literally involved with our winery because they are

Photo courtesy Woodside Vineyards



Woodside Vineyards builds good neighbor and customer relations by inviting the community to help harvest grapes every year.

Though events are effective in communicating with people, Woodside Vineyards must limit the number of them held at the winery because of local ordinances. A winery tasting room also isn't allowed in this residential area. Nevertheless, Mullen

stakeholders in our operations. We've built positive relationships by involving them in our industry. We would have informed community support if ever an issue were to arise before Woodside town officials."

## Vintners Collaborate with Community for Farmworker Housing:

### Joseph Phelps Donates Land for Shelters

In 1999, Napa Valley winegrowers realized the shortage of farmworker housing had reached critical mass when county officials approached the Napa Valley Vintners Association (NVVA) for help in covering a \$40,000 shortfall in operating expenses for local shelters used by migrant workers, explains Joseph Phelps CEO Tom Shelton, who was president of the vintners group at the time. Large numbers of migrants were being turned away from the shelters. They were sleeping on the porch of the Catholic Church, in their cars and under bridges.

The situation was becoming increasingly obvious in Napa and throughout California. More and more workers were needed for replanting and new vineyard establishment. The new vineyard architecture also required more hand labor and therefore more workers for the close vine spacing of super premium wine-growing, says Shelton.

"I talked with our winemaker Craig Williams and owner Joe Phelps about the need for more farmworker housing and a possible site. Eventually, Joe called me and said,

'Donating land was something the winery could do and should do.'" The winery donated eight acres of Napa land for a shelter. This was the first step in making the housing a reality.

Before going public with the proposal, Phelps and Shelton held one-on-one discussions with neighbors

Once the housing site was identified, Joseph Phelps Vineyards and the Napa wine community engaged in a massive communication effort to persuade the community to amend a zoning law allowing landowners to subdivide parcels of less than 40 acres for farmworker housing.

Photo courtesy Joseph Phelps Vineyards



Joseph Phelps Vineyards helped build community support for new farmworker housing in Napa Valley. Displaying a model of the housing are (l to r): winemaker Craig Williams, Peter Drier of the Napa Valley Housing Authority, and Tom Shelton, president and CEO of the winery.

about the plan. People were understandably concerned about the hours of operation, security, water use, the position of the septic system, and just how the whole project would change the neighborhood. The winery also held a group meeting for the neighbors to have an architect and engineer present the plan with drawings and answer questions.

Voters approved the measure by 70 percent. Vineyard owners also passed a bill to assess themselves as much as \$10 an acre to help pay for the housing.

Now, more farmworker housing will soon be built in Napa County. With the county responsible for operation, the first new shelter is planned in St. Helena on the acreage from Joseph Phelps. The housing will accommodate 60 people

#### Resources:

✍ *"The Winegrape Guidebook for Establishing Good Neighbor and Community Relations."* Published by the California Association of Winegrape Growers. May 2001. Phone: 916/924-5370. E-mail: [info@cawg.org](mailto:info@cawg.org).

✍ *"Establishing Good Neighbor and Community Relations Programs."* General session of the 2001 Unified Wine & Grape Symposium. To order tapes of that session, call Tree Farm Tapes, 800/468-0464.

✍ *Sonoma County Grape Growers. "How Do We Earn Our Community's Support?"* Winegrower guidelines for communicating with neighbors. [www.sonomagrapevine.org/pages/growerstoobox/commonground/gtcommon1.html](http://www.sonomagrapevine.org/pages/growerstoobox/commonground/gtcommon1.html). See also "Notes from the Grower Next Door."

[www.sonomagrapevine.org/pages/vineyardviews/vvlnvhome.html](http://www.sonomagrapevine.org/pages/vineyardviews/vvlnvhome.html).

✍ *Napa Valley Vintners Association (NVVA).* A description of significant community and industry issues on which the NVVA is working. [www.napavintners.com/community/interest.html](http://www.napavintners.com/community/interest.html)

and will have a cafeteria and soccer field.

"Residents realized the benefit of not putting the burden of new housing in the incorporated areas. We laid all our cards on the table and everyone appreciated it, even if they didn't agree," says Shelton. "Not surprisingly, we gained a lot of support for the housing plan by getting people's input and encouraging them to be a part of the process," he says.



# THE CODE OF SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING PRACTICES



In early 2001, leadership and funding from Wine Institute and the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) led to the formation of a committee to develop a “Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices.” This proposed voluntary program, establishing statewide guidelines for sustainable farming and winemaking, is still under development and is expected to be introduced to the wine community within the coming year.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to enhance the California wine industry’s leadership role in responding to pressures resulting from population growth, public and legislative attitudes, environmental decisions from regulatory and governmental bodies, and other growth-related issues. The new Code, and its implementation, can greatly augment the industry’s collective and unified ability to accommodate these pressures, while assuring that future generations can produce the finest world-class wines. The goal of the Code is to “promote farming and winemaking practices that are sensitive to the environment, responsive to the needs and interests of society-at-large, and economically feasible in practice.” In a recent address to Wine Institute’s Board of Directors John De Luca characterized the proposed Code as “most likely the greatest legacy we can create for the wine community, our larger society, and generations yet unborn.”

**Project Summary:** More than 50 Wine Institute and CAWG members, as well as outside stakeholders such as representatives from Cal/EPA and independent farm advisors, sit on the committee spearheading the project. Committee Chair Michael Honig leads work on this first-ever statewide initiative, which will include a system to measure the voluntary industry input from vineyards and wineries. The data collected from the project will be used to benchmark the wine community’s progress on sustainability and target educational campaigns where needed. The winegrowing portion of the guide book will build upon the successful programs of the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission and the Central Coast Vineyard Team. Feedback from regional grower and vintner associations and a wide range of academia, environmental and social equity communities has played an important role in the Code development. Dr. Jeff Dlott of RealToolbox, a sustainable agriculture and resource conservation consulting firm, has been contracted to help oversee the project and measurement system.

**Next Steps:** At Wine Institute’s June 2002 Annual Meeting of Members, the Institute Board of Directors provided comment and approved a complete 490-page draft of guidelines for the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices. The committee and Institute staff are now going forward to obtain outside comment of the approved draft by environmental and social equity groups, university educators, regulators and other industry experts.

To attract additional implementation funds for this project, the Wine Institute Board has established a 501(c)3 nonprofit, non-lobbying foundation in conjunction with the California Association of Winegrape Growers. This was necessary as many philanthropic organizations donate solely to 501(c)3 groups. Named the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, this entity will help advance the adoption of sustainable viticulture and winemaking practices through research and education. Bylaws have been approved and a board of trustees has been appointed by both Wine Institute and CAWG. For more information on the project, go online to [www.wineinstitute.org/communications/SustainablePractices/vision.htm](http://www.wineinstitute.org/communications/SustainablePractices/vision.htm) or call the Communications Department at 415/356-7520.

## Upcoming topics for “Highlight of the Month” publications are as follows:

- ✂ July – “Increasing Predators and Scouting Pests” \*
  - ✂ August – “Assessing and Reducing Energy Needs” \* ✂ ✂ September – “Composting”\*
  - ✂ October – “Controlling Erosion” \* ✂ ✂ November – “Protecting Air and Water Quality”
  - ✂ December – “Attracting and Retaining Good People”
- ✂ Topics of a seasonal nature are matched to the time of year when the practice takes place.

The practices of “Communicating with Neighbors and Communities,” highlighted in this issue, pertain to the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices in the following areas: Viticulture; Soil Management; Pest Management; Water Management; Water Conservation & Water Quality; Ecosystem Management & Function; Material Handling; Human Resources.

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