



## Sustainable Practice Highlight: Communicating Sustainability

### Solar Pavilion Helps Communicate Message of Healthy Winery and Vineyard Operations

The Beatles tune, “Here Comes the Sun,” may come to mind when visitors drive up to Cline Cellars, a family-owned winery in the Carneros District of Sonoma Valley. The winery has gone solar in a major way—installing a huge solar electricity system on the winery’s roof, along with an educational solar pavilion.

The custom system on the 50,000-square-foot roof is projected to provide the winery with an annual savings of \$92,000. The 2,000 solar panels will generate enough power to eliminate peak-period usage of electricity from the statewide grid while also selling excess power back to the local utility.

The solar-power system is just the latest innovation at Cline Cellars.

According to Charene Beltramo, Cline Cellars marketing director, Fred Cline felt strongly about the importance of sustainable farming and conveying that message to others.

“Fred Cline’s belief is that consumers have a



*The solar pavilion at Cline Cellars describes to visitors the clean energy used to power the winery. Owner Fred Cline believes products produced in a healthy, environmentally responsible manner appeal to many consumers.*  
*Cline Cellars photo*

greater awareness and desire to ingest healthy products and that’s why we focus so much on making our vineyard land healthy,” she said. “For the most part, we convey our message to consumers through on-site tours of our property, through marketing materials, the web site at [www.clinecellars.com](http://www.clinecellars.com) and in-store poster boards.”

Visitors can also view the solar pavilion while attending an event at the winery,—from small business luncheons to weddings and receptions with 1,000 guests. People are encouraged to picnic on the grounds, and private

group tours can be arranged by calling ahead or visiting the web site.

The winery also communicates its message through a very active wine club, a newsletter that includes recipes and wine and food pairings, and events such as the Holiday in Carneros and Winter Wine-maker Dinner.

Cline Cellars’ farming methods incorporate both organic and biodynamic principles.

“We create self-nourishing systems for the land. It’s all about making the land healthier and giving back to the land,” said Beltramo.

#### Cline Cellars Sustainable Farming Practices Include:

- Composting with grape pomice, vineyard prunings and other mature organic materials.
- Compost tea is added to the vines via drip irrigation and applied directly to leaves. This tea contains molasses, fish emulsion to increase nitrogen content, rock dust, microbes and other nutrients.
- The soil additions include volcanic material from Arizona; volcanic rock from the vineyard property that is high in trace minerals; and ground-up oyster shells to provide calcium.
- A volunteer cover crop of grains such as barley and oats, and nitrogen fixing plants like bell-beans, is grown but not disked.
- Hand pulling and an under-row cultivator are used to control weeds.
- Synthetic pesticides are not used. Cover crops provide habitat to attract beneficial insects that prey on insect pests.
- Soil moisture content is checked daily by digging in the soil and dictating when and how much water is applied to the vineyards so grapevines do not have to compete for water with the cover crop.

## **Robert Mondavi Winery Sustainable Practices**

Robert Mondavi Winery takes an innovative approach to taking care of the land. Here are some of the sustainable farming practices that are followed:

- Planting cover crops that improve the land's natural fertility, control erosion and host beneficial insects.
- Creating a bio-diverse habitat in the vineyard by planting trees and other vegetation to attract beneficial insects and predators.
- Conserving soil through composting and manual weeding.
- Reducing insect pests, powdery mildew and bunch rot through leaf removal and canopy management.
- Dedicating significant acreage to permanent cover crops or no-till.
- Fermenting wines with native yeasts to impart more complexity and character.
- Recycling glass, paper, plastics, cardboard, corks and wood.

## **Neighborhood Meetings, Web Site, Winery Tours and More Communicate Sustainability**

At Robert Mondavi Winery in Oakville, sustainability is more than a word—it's a way of life that got its start several years before it became an integral part of agricultural vocabulary.

Before it was called sustainability, Robert Mondavi called it natural farming when he introduced it more than 20 years ago with goals of worker health, environmental protection and enhanced grape quality.

At the winery, wine-grape growing involves striking a balance between their passion for excellence and their trust in the natural expression of soil, climate and vine.

"When you work a piece of ground from one season to the next, from one year to the next, you develop a very close relationship with that piece of ground," said Matt Ashby, winery vineyard manager. "It becomes intuitive that you know the needs of the soil and the needs of the vines."

Being good neighbors is important at Robert Mondavi Winery. Ashby said that the winery holds neighborhood meetings twice yearly at which people are invited to the winery and vineyard so they can better understand what is being done on site.

"We explain to them what we are doing as far as vineyard development, streambed restoration and so forth. This goes a long way toward establishing a positive relationship with them and they support us once they understand what is going on," he said.

The winery also provides Internet users with a very active web site that



*Goats provide natural weed control in perimeter areas around vineyards at Robert Mondavi Winery. The winery uses the web site, neighborhood meetings, tours and publications to convey their sustainable winegrowing message.*  
*Robert Mondavi photo*

does a lot more than describe the many great wines that are available for purchase. There is information on the winery's history, philosophy, ranches, winery and winemaker and, most importantly, a section on sustainable practices at the winery and vineyards, including the winery's participation in community projects for watershed management and environmental conservation. To view the site, see:

[www.robertmondaviwinery.com/iw\\_environmental.asp](http://www.robertmondaviwinery.com/iw_environmental.asp)

Winery tours also incorporate sustainable winegrowing information into the personal dialogue with the thousands of visitors to the winery each year. The communication includes the message about how the winery currently manages more than 1,000 acres of winegrapes in the Napa Valley, where they use raptor roosts to encourage the proliferation of

natural predators to control rodents, plant cover crops to replenish the soil and reduce erosion, and use composted grape pomace and fresh pomace to increase soil fertility.

The winery practices integrated pest management to minimize chemical use in the vineyard by combining biological, cultural and mechanical methods to control insects, diseases and weeds. Certain cultural practices, such as tolerating some pest insects in order to maintain a population of beneficial insects, play a key role in their success, Ashby said.

The winery's efforts have also not gone unnoticed in the policy world. In 1998, Robert Mondavi Winery received an Integrated Pest Management Innovator Award from the California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Pesticide Regulation.

## Sustainable Message Plays Key Role in Consumer Communications

**T**ablas Creek Vineyard in Paso Robles shares many attributes of the Rhone Valley winegrape growing region in France. Located 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean on California's Central Coast, the winery property encompasses 120 acres of rolling hills with limestone soils, favorable climate and rugged terrain. It was founded by the Perrin family of Chateau de Beaucastel in France and importer Robert Haas, the founder of Vineyard Brands.

Vine cuttings imported from France were first planted in 1993, with new clones arriving each year between 1993 and 2000. Planting continues using cuttings from their own nursery and they are well on their way to achieving their goal of having 110 acres in vines by 2010.

The vineyard is certified organic and uses such practices as cover cropping and solar energy and creating wetlands ecosystems.

One thing that they do very well at Tablas Creek is get the message out about

the benefits of sustainable farming, said Jason Haas, vineyard general manager. Communicating sustainability takes many forms, including a dynamic web site, a consumer newsletter, wine club, winery events, daily tours, industry conferences and, of course, word of mouth.

"We just talk to people about what we are doing and why we are doing it whenever we are out showing our wines or attending an event," said Haas.

One innovative approach that is growing in popularity is their blog, which can be accessed at <http://tablascreek.typepad.com>. The dialogue is fun while communicating sustainable winemaking.

A unique aspect of their cultural practices is the use of compost teas, which feed the vines while providing protection against mildew. The practice allows them to reduce the amount of sulfur that is applied to the vineyard.

"We let the compost ripen for a couple of years and then make some com-



*The Tablas Creek web site provides education on cover crops, beneficial insects, compost and other sustainable practices.*

*Tablas Creek photo*

post tea by putting the compost into cheesecloth and soaking it in barrels of water and bubbling oxygen through the barrels," he said. "This process creates a super rich broth full of nutrients that we can run through our irrigation lines and also spray directly on the vines so they get some foliar nutrition."

Why do they farm organically? The answer is simple—they feel that the grapes produced in this way have intense flavor and true varietal character.

"We feel this is the best way to make wines that have the characteristics of the Rhone varieties and of the place where we grow them. The fact that we are also exposing ourselves and the people we work with to fewer toxins and are leaving the land in at least as good or better condition than it was when we got here is a bonus," Haas said. "Though we farm organically, we don't make organic wine or market ourselves as an organic winery."

### Tablas Creek Vineyard Sustainability

Jason Haas says that to farm organically, a grower needs to do three things well: control the diseases, control the pests, and keep up with the fertilization. Here are some of his farming practices:

- Mechanical weed control using a Pellenc mechanical weeder with sensor arm and computer to avoid damaging vines, posts and wires.
- Use of cover crops consisting of oats, vetch and sweet peas for both weed control and providing soil nutrients.
- Use of beneficial insects. "We release insect populations each year but we are having to do less and less as the population that's already here gets better established."
- Leave cover crops all year at selected locations to attract other insect species.
- When an infestation of leafhoppers gets to be too much for the beneficial insects, organic soaps and sprays are used to knock it down to a level that the beneficials can control.
- Use of nutrient-rich compost teas to benefit both the soil and vines, and also help with mildew prevention.
- All pruning, thinning and harvesting is done by hand.
- Solar power to produce enough electricity to satisfy more than half of the vineyard and winery's annual needs.
- Creation of wetlands ponds with plants such as cattails and reeds to naturally clean process water, used to clean barrels and other equipment during harvest.



*Tablas Creek Winemaker Neil Collins (center) gives an inside glimpse on growing and making wine at a consumer seminar. The session is one of several public events where the winery's sustainable practices are shared.*

*Tablas Creek photo*



# California's Sustainable Winegrowing Program

The Sustainable Winegrowing Program (SWP), introduced in 2002 by members of Wine Institute and the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG), has earned the California wine community a reputation as the wine world's leader in the adoption of practices that are environmentally sensitive, socially responsible and economically feasible. The organizations formed the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, a year later to advance the program.

CSWA has held over 150 educational workshops throughout the state, attended by several thousand winery and vineyard enterprises. More than 1,300 workshop participants have evaluated their operations using a 490-page workbook of best management practices, developed by the Joint Committee of 50 members from Wine Institute, CAWG and other key stakeholders.

In December 2006, CSWA issued a Progress Report providing an update of the 2004 Sustainability Report showing the level of sustainable practices among vintners and growers statewide. California wine is unique in that it was the first industry sector to use a common assessment tool to document the adoption of sustainable practices among its members and report the results publicly. Statewide evaluation results collected from workshops are contained in the 2006 Progress

Report, and represent 53 percent of California's 273 million case production and 33 percent of the state's 522,000 wine acres.

More specifically, winegrowers increased their performance for 31 of 38 pest management criteria and across all criteria by 8 percent from the 2004 to 2006 reports. Greater increases for certain practices were: reduced-risk pesticides, up 18%; employee training, up 16%; predatory mite releases, up 44%; and weed monitoring, up 22%.



Weed monitoring workshops, such as the one above co-hosted with the Central Coast Vineyard Team, provide education on how to control weeds with sustainable methods. Photo courtesy Central Coast Vineyard Team

**WORKSHOPS.** In addition to self-evaluation workshops, targeted education workshops are being held to help vintners and growers increase SWP adoption and improve scores in individual chapter areas. Grants for workshops and related activities have been provided by: American Farmland Trust for integrated pest management; Natural Resources



Online self-assessment is now available at [www.sustainablewinegrowing.org](http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.org).

Conservation Service (NRCS) to address air and water quality; National Fish & Wildlife for ecosystem management; and PG&E for energy efficiency.

**PARTNERSHIPS.** Wine Institute, CAWG and CSWA are reaching out to potential partner organizations to seek funding, share resources

and includes a new air quality chapter as well as updates. The new chapter, funded by the NRCS grant, was developed by the Joint Committee and internal and external reviewers of the SWP workbook.

Another major improvement is the introduction of a newly launched web site at [www.sustainablewinegrowing.org](http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.org). The workbook is available online for California participants to self-assess and receive reports about their individual results.

**REPORTING.** By publicly documenting winegrowing practices through the publication of sustainability reports, the SWP program can demonstrate progress and challenges, and serve as a model for other sectors.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger awarded CSWA the state's top environmental award, the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award in 2004. California Council for Environment and Economic Balance also named Wine Institute, CAWG and CSWA recipients of the 2005 Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Award for the program's demonstration of ideals of environmental and economic balance.

For information, contact [info@sustainablewinegrowing.org](mailto:info@sustainablewinegrowing.org) or 415/356-7645.

and knowledge, and develop incentives for SWP participants. In addition, findings from the Sustainability Reports will be reviewed with viticulture and enology research institutions to identify priority research gaps and encourage mission-driven research that speeds SWP adoption.

**WORKBOOK.** The second edition workbook was released in December

Please share this newsletter with your staff. An electronic copy is available online at [www.wineinstitute.org/programs/swp/docs/communicatingsustainability.pdf](http://www.wineinstitute.org/programs/swp/docs/communicatingsustainability.pdf). Copyright 2007. To republish any portion of this publication, please gain prior written consent from the Wine Institute Communications Department, 415/356-7525, [gioriuchi@wineinstitute.org](mailto:gioriuchi@wineinstitute.org).

