Coppola Sees Value in Certification

April 2017

The Francis Ford Coppola Winery in Geyserville (Sonoma County) bottles more than 1.5 million cases of wine a year, almost all from purchased grapes. “We only farm about two percent of the fruit that goes into our program,” says Lise Asimont, the winery’s director of grower relations. “Without our growers, we’re nothing.”

An early supporter of sustainable certification, the winery recently received the 2017 California Green Medal: Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Award in the Leader category. Both the winery and estate vineyards are Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE). The Leadership Award recognizes the company’s deep commitment to sustainability and its efforts to convince dozens of its growers, from Mendocino to Santa Barbara, to follow its lead. Asimont and her colleague Rhonda Hood, Coppola’s safety, sustainability and compliance manager, implement this endeavor.

You work with 150 different grape growers in 10 California counties. How do you keep their goals aligned with yours?

LA: We sit down with every grower individually at the end of harvest. We present each grower with a packet that contains all of the pertinent viticultural data we’ve accumulated throughout the year. At the end of the meeting, we taste the wines that we made off of their site and we start a conversation about a plan for the following year.

They look forward to it. They call it the “report card,” and they give us feedback as well on topics from communication to contracts to how we receive grapes. So it’s a continuous-improvement opportunity for us, too. It takes five months to get to everybody, and it’s a lot of work, but it is totally worth it. It’s a very cool feedback loop.

For the past couple of years, we have offered a per-ton bonus to any grower who is certified sustainable. There were growers we thought would be slow to adopt, but they did it. Last year we had a “Let’s Get Certified Sustainable” workshop for growers. We provided laptops and assisted them with the process. As of this year, 85 percent of the grapes we crush will be certified sustainable. Our goal is 100 percent by 2019.

Why do you bother?

LA: It’s not to be fashionable. The cultural practices of a certified sustainable grower really do translate into better wine. These practices are proactive and well timed. For example, a certified sustainable grower is going to pull leaves at the right...
Resources & Publications

2017 Green Medal Awards Announced:
Congratulations to our 2017 California Green Medal Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Awards recipients: www.greenmedal.org

- Francis Ford Coppola Winery: Leader Award
- St. Francis Winery & Vineyard: Community Award
- Monterey Pacific, Inc.: Business Award
- Spottswoode Estate Vineyard and Winery: Environment Award

CSWA Year in Review: CSWA had another busy year in 2016. Look through our Year in Review for an overview of our sustainability report, updates to CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE, new videos on certification, trade survey results and more. www.sustainablewinegrowing.org/CSWA-publications.php

California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Workbook: Download individual chapters or the entire workbook to learn more about sustainability in your vineyard or winery. www.sustainablewinegrowing.org/swpworkbook.php

Wine Institute
425 Market Street, Suite 1000
San Francisco, CA 94105

Off and running: Bud break starts the growing season.

How does the Green Team operate?

RH: It has about 25 members from different departments, from the legal department to the tasting room to maintenance. The purpose is to evaluate and implement more sustainable measures. They meet several times a year and collaboratively ask, “How can we do things better?” Sometimes, a suggestion is enough to get the ball rolling, like composting in the break room or setting the default on printers and copy machines to two-sided printing.

What would you like wineries to know about the value of certification?

RH: Certification gives you that third-party credibility, not only with your consumer but with the trade as well. And when you’re going through the self-assessment for certification, you see things you could be doing. If there are minimum criteria that you aren’t meeting, the assessment helps you create an action plan and achieve those things.

Certification is the ultimate commitment, because once certified, you can’t stay stagnant. Every year you have to do better.