Participation in the California Sustainable Winegrowing Program (SWP) self-assessment workshops has continued to grow, with 33% of the total statewide winegrape acreage and 53% of the total statewide annual wine production having been assessed by growers and wineries.

The SWP provides growers and vintners with information and tools to increase the adoption of sustainable practices statewide. This innovative program is generating enthusiastic and widespread involvement by the wine community, and measuring and demonstrating improvements in vineyard and winery practices throughout California.

Participation in 2006 demonstrates a 24% increase in the total number of enterprises involved in the program since the 2004 report, a 23% increase in vineyard acreage and a 19% increase in wine case production that has been assessed and submitted (as of October 2006.)

Elements of progress covered in this 2006 interim report include:
- Increased and ongoing involvement and support of the California wine community in the self-assessment process, involving 1,165 wineries and vineyards throughout California from the start of assessment activities in 2002 to October 2006.
- Release of a second edition and web-based version of the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices Self-Assessment Workbook, which includes an additional chapter on Air Quality. A new, revised web site at www.sustainablewinegrowing.org has an online edition of the workbook where winery or vineyard staff can self-assess their sustainability in 227 types of practices, and receive feedback on their individual results.
- Demonstration of results in Integrated Pest Management through targeted education and reassessment. Winegrowers increased their performance in 31 of 38 pest management criteria by almost 8%. Greater increases appeared for several practices, including: use of reduced-risk pesticides, up 18%; employee training, up 16%; predatory mite releases, up 44%; and weed monitoring, up 22%.
- A growing number of partners to leverage knowledge and resources.

Several unique factors have facilitated progress and success in the Sustainable Winegrowing Program:
1) Involvement of many vintners and growers with multiple partners and stakeholders is a crucial attribute of the program. There has been a tremendous effort to participate by the wine community, and numerous partners have been actively involved and enable continued success.
2) SWP is comprehensive in scope, addressing three interlinked goals of Environmental Soundness, Economic Feasibility, and Social Equity, and covering a broad range of elements in the production of grapes and wine — from ground to bottle.
3) SWP uses a systems approach, recognizing the interconnections between soil, water, air, vine health, grape quality, energy, materials, human resources, and many other factors involved with producing quality grapes and wines.
4) SWP builds bridges between agriculture and environmental interests, through partnerships with many stakeholders, cultivating “win-win” approaches and synergies.
5) SWP’s innovative system of data tracking and reporting allows monitoring and measurement of participants’ results, and improvements over time; and the aggregated results for the wine industry are reported in a transparent way to the partners and the public.

The SWP is providing leadership in the path to sustainability, and that gives the California wine industry a unique
advantage in the global market. The program is also setting a positive example for other agriculture sectors and crops — and gives everyone strong hope for the future.

The California wine community’s growing participation

A prominent feature of the SWP is the active leadership and involvement by growers and vintners throughout all phases of the program — from development through ongoing implementation of the program, and by adoption of sustainable practices in wineries and vineyards.

Overall guidance for the development of the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices was provided by the Sustainable Winegrowing Joint Committee, comprised of 50 individuals including members of the Wine Institute and California Association of VINEGRAPE Growers (CAWG), representing all major winegrowing regions and small, medium, and large vineyard and winery enterprises.

Self-assessment and targeted education workshops

Self-assessment workshops, utilizing the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices Self-Assessment Workbook, represent the first phase in the cycle of continual improvement. In the 2004 interim report, the initial goals for self-assessment participation were surpassed during the first round of workshops.

Working in collaboration with regional winegrower associations, the SWP has organized 88 educational workshops (since 2004) throughout California, which have reached over 5,000 growers and vintners. These workshops target areas in need of improvement, covering topics such as Integrated Pest Management, Water and Air Quality issues, Ecosystem Management, and Energy Efficiency. They enable participants to obtain new information, exchange ideas with colleagues, and develop action plans to implement more sustainable practices.

“As farmers and landowners, we love the land and are ever-mindful of environmental impacts,” says Randy Lange, CSWA Chairman and co-founder of Lange Twins Wine Estates (Woodbridge, CA). “Exhausted soils and misuse of the land and water contribute to less productive vineyards. Environmental stewardship comes naturally because it makes sense for our business, our family, and our community.”

Wineries that have assessed vineyards are also included in the vineyard assessment numbers. Nearly all wineries grow wine grapes and many also purchase grapes from other sources for use in their wines.

The California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance acknowledges the support and involvement of the wine community, partners, stakeholders, and funders, including the American Farmland Trust, the California Department of Food & Agriculture, Pacific Gas & Electric, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, and members of CAWG and the Wine Institute.

Looking to the future, the California wine community remains committed to expanding the Sustainable Winegrowing Program. The goals are to increase the involvement of vineyards and wineries in self-assessments, offer targeted education and action plan workshops statewide, work with research institutions to address knowledge gaps, develop new educational materials, translate educational materials into Spanish, and expand the partnership network.

It is hoped that the efforts of the SWP can serve as an inspiration and model for other agricultural sectors, to increase the adoption of practices that are environmentally sound, socially responsible, and economically feasible.