

Response to National Geographic Article

I am writing in response to the menacing title and erroneous graphic portraying the “Toll of Wine” in the May 2009 issue of National Geographic. This graphic depicts the carbon intensity of shipping wine from various global wine regions to key U.S. cities and bases its data on a seriously flawed, two-year-old working paper that is filled with untested assumptions, has not been peer reviewed, and does not accurately reflect the complexities of greenhouse gas emissions in the wine sector. Research on a science-based Life Cycle Analysis for wine is underway but this graphic, as well as the paper on which it is based, misleads consumers into believing that foreign imports are somehow more environmentally-friendly than California wines.

This distortion of fact is particularly unfortunate given the ground-breaking work by California wineries and vineyards to tackle the issue of GHG emissions by working to improve air quality and energy efficiency, along with other sustainable winegrowing practices from ground to bottle, through the California Sustainable Winegrowing Program (www.sustainablewinegrowing.org). This statewide program guides California’s wineries and winegrape growers to adopt an integrated system for their operations based on tested “best practices” in alternative energy, packaging, transportation, production and farming practices to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) footprints in the state with the most stringent environmental laws in the country.

California vintners and growers are taking their carbon footprint seriously and have partnered with the international wine community to create an International Greenhouse Gas Protocol and Accounting Tool (www.wineinstitute.org/ghgprotocol). In addition, we are working with scientists to better understand the carbon balance of wineries and vineyards, including how vines, soil and broader vineyard ecosystems may benefit the environment by sequestering carbon. For instance, we worked with leading agriculture and climate scientists at UC Davis on a comprehensive review of state of the science in 2008 (visit <http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.org/publications.php>).

We’re confident that U.S. consumers can add “environmental track record” to many other reasons for choosing California wines, including quality, diversity, value, and significant contributions to local, state, and federal economies through jobs, taxes, charitable donations and tourism.

Sincerely,

Allison Jordan
Executive Director
California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance