



# 2021 U.S. SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING SUMMIT

## APRIL 19-21, 2021 | Q&A

During the Summit there were many opportunities for informative Q & A; however, not all questions were addressed live. Here are responses we solicited for the remaining questions, in the order of each session.

### DAY 1: EXPLORE U.S. SUSTAINABLE WINE TASTING & SEMINAR

Answered by: California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA), Evan Goldstein MS, Holly Wells and Peter Work

**Q:** *Evan, can you explain what you mean by minerality? There doesn't seem to be a commonly held definition of this term.*

**A:** Minerality is difficult to fully explain as indeed there is no accepted definition of minerality in wine, no complete consensus on the characteristics that are associated with it, nor even whether it is perceived primarily as a smell, a taste or a mouthfeel sensation. The words most frequently associated with wine minerality are largely olfactory sensations and included gunflint, flint, wet or hot stones, asphalt, and chalkiness. A second important category is mostly palate sensations that were related to acidity/freshness, but also a gritty/chalky sensation. It is different than organic earthiness which is more alive and filled with microfauna (turned dry, compost, soil, etc.). (Evan Goldstein MS)

**Q:** *Can you speak to the meaning / value of "Old Vine" designation?*

**A:** Old Vines also is tricky. There is, again, no legal definition and it really depends on who you ask. Most will say that 50 years up qualifies which others might say more than 30. [California's Historic Vineyards Society](#), one of the utmost protagonists, believes 50. What people do agree upon is older vines = lower yields, more concentration, often more drought and climate change resistant, and special (are the vines old because the wines are good or are the wines good because the vines are old?). (Evan Goldstein, MS)

**Q:** *What challenges do you face in achieving (and maintaining) certification? And what impacts of climate change are you seeing and what are you doing in the vineyard to protect your crops/adapt to the changes?*

**A:** One of the challenges of achieving certification is the paperwork. You need someone to stay diligent and organized during the process. Smoke from wild fires have been impactful on our crops. This is still a topic of discussion in how we address the smoke. (Holly Wells)

**Q:** *Is the Zin a vineyard designate?*

**A:** This wine is made from a selection of different certified sustainable vineyards in the Russian River Valley of Sonoma County. (CSWA)

**Q:** *Can you (Peter Work) share a bit more about your biodynamic practices; what are you doing differently in the vineyard to go beyond sustainable or organic to be biodynamic?*

**A:** I could write pages about this but check out some of [the videos on our website](#) where Rebecca and I describe our Biodynamic® practices. (Peter Work)

Visit [the learn page of the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing website](#) to learn about the similarities and differences in these concepts. (CSWA)

**Q:** *How are you applying nitrogen in your vineyards and what do you do to avoid leaching of plant available nitrogen?*

**A:** We plant legumes that bind nitrogen from the air. We mow and disk it into the soil. (Peter Work)

**Q:** *Conventional farming often gets top attention at universities because the results are often easier to take to market in the form of a sellable product. How do we properly incentivize universities to take up more projects focused on organic / Biodynamic® / regenerative?*

**A:** All research funding is based on the priorities of a region, the impact to the research community, and the practical application to the industry. To encourage more research for organic / Biodynamic® / regenerative farming practices, the proposals need to address these topics. Maybe collaborate with certification programs to help fund such research projects? (Holly Wells)

**Q:** *If you eliminate foil do you think there are any concerns (oxidation or other)? Do you use anything to cover the top of the cork? Or just eliminate the foil with no other changes?*

**A:** We just eliminate the foil because, in our opinion, it really adds no value. A typical foil has 2-4 holes that allows for air penetration so it doesn't reduce oxidation compared to the cork. We don't have any concerns at all and believe this fits well with our sustainable strategy. (Peter Work)

**Q:** *Would it be possible to obtain sustainable labels here in the USA from wine imported from Italy?*

**A:** Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing only certifies wines made in California. By and large wines are certified in the states, regions and countries where they are made. An Italian wine would need to apply for certification through sustainability programs in Italy such as VIVA or Equalitas. (CSWA)

**Q:** *For the WA state certifications, are you modeling after any other certification program in particular?*

**A:** As of now, I know we will be following the Vinewise® \ Winerywise™ program, which was developed by the industry and has been modified over the past 20 years. For more information visit the [Washington Winegrowers' website](#). (Holly Wells)

**Q:** *I'm curious about ways you've been getting awareness of your sustainability initiatives out to your customers, and whether you've seen a growth of queries about it from them over time (whether in tasting room, DTC, or what have you)?*

**A:** We do a lot of winemaker events in the U.S. and Europe. You have to be out there to educate the trade and consumers about the importance of good, conscious farming. During the last year we have done an extended series of virtual tasting shows to stay in touch with everyone and continuously "preach" the message. (Peter Work)

**Q:** *Each winery is so different in ecosystem/habitat/vine, how are you selecting your cover crops? Are they the same every year, or do you change it up?*

**A:** The climate in Eastern Washington is dry with hot summers and cold winters; therefore, we are limited on our cover crops. Winter wheat is our viticulturist's choice of crop. (Holly Wells)

**Q:** *What is alcohol / pH on this Zin?*

**A:** Wine Details: Oak: 100% French oak, 40% new, Time in oak: 10 months, Alcohol: 15.3% TA: 6.8 g/L, pH: 3.46. (CSWA)

## DAY 2: HOW TO MESSAGE SUSTAINABILITY TO CONSUMERS & TRADE: WORKSHOPPING “SUSTAINABILITY” AS A CHALLENGER BRAND

Answered by: California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) and Mark Barden

**Q:** *What standards do we need to have to avoid “sustainability” being merely a marketing trope? Or “my program is better than your program”?*

**A:** Great question. The Summit is a partnership among four states to create a unified definition and common principles around sustainable winegrowing so consumers and trade can better understand that while programs are “region-specific” they all have the same foundation. Our [U.S. Sustainable Winegrowing website](#) was created to foster this understanding. (CSWA)

**Q:** *Should wine labeling on pesticide use be made mandatory?*

**A:** Most foods and beverage crops around the world, including those grown organically and sustainably, require crop protection materials to address the challenges of pests, weeds and mildew. For wines produced sustainably, these are used only when needed and sparingly in growing grapes including information on labels could be misleading as consumers might assume that materials are in the wine. Additionally, it would be difficult to provide context on safe levels of use in vineyards on labels. (CSWA)

**Q:** *Do you (California Sustainable Winegrowing) have organized information with all the differences on each concept (sustainability, organic, etc.)? It’s important for the consumer.*

**A:** Yes, we invite you to [explore the learn page of the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing website](#) to learn about the similarities and differences in these concepts. (CSWA)

**Q:** *Did the Wine Intelligence consumer survey shed any light on buying preferences for Gen Z or X? Are they willing to pay more for sustainable wine?*

**A:** Yes, the survey demonstrated that all things being equal, Gen Z and Gen X prefer to purchase a sustainably made wine over one that is not. And, these wine buyers are willing to spend an average of \$3 more per bottle on a sustainably made wine. [View more research results here.](#) (CSWA)

**Q:** *I’ve heard that if you live on the East Coast, it’s less of a carbon footprint to purchase European wine than West Coast wine due to emissions in cross-continental trucking vs. shipping. Has the California Sustainability community discussed this or brainstormed some solutions?*

**A:** Wine Institute worked with life cycle assessment experts to look into the findings of the study that proposed the notion of the “green line” that found shipping wine from California to the East Coast as more carbon intensive than wine from Europe. The expert review found that, while it is clear that transportation burdens associated with distribution is a hot spot for the wine overall, carbon emissions from distribution logistics alone are not an indication of environmental preference between wine products. Therefore, [a carbon footprint assessment](#) was completed for California wine to better understand the GHG hotspots and where the industry could focus education and improvements. (CSWA)

**Q:** *Marshall McLuhan famously said “The medium is the message.” Could marketing sustainable wine include getting beyond the glass bottle and cork bottle, into new, more eco-friendly packaging, which can also revolutionize the look of the package and much lighter weight?*

**A:** In addition to the live responses in Day 2, check out the Day 1 Tasting & Seminar video to hear more from other winemakers on this topic. (CSWA)

**Q:** *How much winery interest in sustainability is driven by consumer vs investor demand?*

**A:** While we have not directly studied that relationship, you can [find more insights into consumer interest](#) in the research we commissioned in 2019. (CSWA)

**Q:** *How do we, as producers, avoid the appearance of “green washing”?*

**A:** Market research indicates that third-party certifications are by and large viewed by consumers to be the most trusted mechanism of ground truthing sustainability claims. (CSWA)

**Q:** *The wine industry has been historically exclusive to the detriment of many of its consumers, particularly in communities of color. How do you expand the conversation around the social equity piece of sustainability?*

**A:** CSWA recently added information about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to its sustainable winegrowing self-assessment workbook as a way to help increase the awareness and education around this important topic for its many vineyard and winery participants. A DEI session on Day 3 of the summit was included as a way to help bring awareness to the link between DEI and sustainability, and other educational opportunities are being explored and developed. (CSWA)

## DAY 2: PART 2 SUMMIT SUSTAINABLE VINEYARD & WINERY TOUR

Answered by: California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA), Niki Wente and Washington State Wine Commission.

**Q:** *When composting with manure and / or working pruning remains back into the soil, how do you mitigate against introducing other unwanted things back into your soil?*

**A:** My brother has been making our compost for years. We mix the pommace with other organic waste material from our gardens, horses, farm and we take pre-consumer food scraps from a local college and yard waste from the surrounding community and put it in wind rows. We mix it with a front loader every few days. It works well, gets up to 160 degrees in the middle of the pile and kills off weed seeds. No new equipment was needed. We get enough rain in NY that we don't have to add water to it. (CSWA)

**Q:** *Wente, will you now or do you intend to use reverse osmosis (RO) water in the vineyard?*

**A:** We will continue to explore different ways to supply our vineyards with water in a sustainable way. At this time we do not have plans to use RO but as it becomes more available we certainly wouldn't rule it out. (Niki Wente)

**Q:** *How does the Washington State Wine Commission provide wineries and consumers with marketing information and materials about winegrower cultural, environmental and community sustainable practices?*

**A:** Learn more about the sustainability work of the [Washington State Wine Commission](#). (CSWA)

In addition to the current sustainability web page, we're about to launch a new Washington Wine website that will have a much larger space dedicated to sustainability resources. We are also in the midst of building our own Washington Sustainable certification program, and as part of that will have a comprehensive PR and Marketing plan up and running in the next 6-8 months. (Washington State Wine Commission)

**Q:** *Question to Niki: When using sheep, is there a risk they eat the grapes? How do you avoid that?*

**A:** We take the sheep out of the vineyard when the vines come out of dormancy. Currently the sheep are in our fallow land helping us with fire mitigation. (Niki Wente)

**Q:** *Fingerweeders have been a game changer in our experience thanks to high speed and low power requirement. Has anyone calculated the carbon footprint of this technology compared to the slower hydraulic driven under vine cultivators?*

**A:** We have not heard of any carbon footprint studies on this technology, but would be interested in learning more if you have any information or resources to share about the technology. (CSWA)

**Q:** *With all the hand labor operations, is labor availability a future concern for sustainability?*

**A:** Absolutely, this is certainly one of the reasons why we feel that automation and mechanization with renewable energy is so important for the future. (Niki Wentz)

### DAY 3: GROWER PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCY

Answered by: California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) and Suzanne Hunt.

**Q:** *What are some new wine jobs brought on by climate crisis? It feels frivolous to make 500 cases per year while the climate is crashing.*

**A:** Research jobs and Sustainability Coordinator, Manager or Director positions (Suzanne Hunt).

**Q:** *What are some of the early findings for soil health from Russian River Valley that have proven impactful?*

**A:** Read about the [Soil Health projects.](#) (CSWA)

**Q:** *I am interested to hear about the speakers' experience with composting. Livestock in the vineyard is not practical for us - we would just be feeding the resident coyotes and mountain lions. We are considering composting, which we haven't done before.*

**A:** My brother has been making our compost for years. We mix the pomace with other organic waste material from our gardens, horses, farm and we take pre-consumer food scraps from a local college and yard waste from the surrounding community and put it in wind rows. We mix it with a front loader every few days. It works well, gets up to 160 degrees in the middle of the pile and kills off weed seeds. No new equipment was needed. We get enough rain in NY that we don't have to add water to it. (Suzanne Hunt)

**Q:** *What is your experience or assessment of bio-fertilizers? These are organic enhancements (minerals, yeasts) that purportedly enhance the microbiome and claim to enhance vineyard resilience, which in wildfire country is really important.*

**A:** We have never purchased any of these. They seem quite expensive. We use compost and animal manures. (Suzanne Hunt)