



## Napa Vintners Lead the Green Revolution

By Terry Hall

**N**apa Valley is the most widely recognized American wine region in the world. Interestingly, the region accounts for only 4 percent of California's winegrape harvest—but nearly 25 percent of the state's economic impact from wine—quite a disproportionate ratio. Look deeper, and you'll realize that Napa represents just 8 percent of California's vineyard land. This means the average grower in this appellation harvests just half of what growers around the state do, about four tons per acre. This explains much about how these heralded wines are made: lots of work in the vineyard, thinning the clusters to let only the best ripen to harvest.

Tucked between the Vaca Range on the east and the Mayacamas Mountains on the west, the bulk of Napa Valley vineyards and wineries stretch one after another between the towns of Napa and Calistoga. It's a homogenous agricultural landscape, dating back nearly 150 years, that's created a unique environment for the business of agriculture.

In the late 19th century, there were about 140 wineries in the valley, but after Prohibition and the Great Depression, that number dropped to around 25, where it stayed well into the 1960s. In 1943, a loosely knit trade association called the Napa Valley Vintners was formed to promote and protect the Napa Valley Appellation and ensure its recognition as a winegrowing region second to none.

In 1968, Napa County enacted a forward-thinking land use policy called the Napa Valley Agricultural Preserve. The Ag Preserve, as it's known today, with more than 30,000 acres within its domain, marks the first time in the United States that land has ever been set aside specifically for agriculture. A renaissance in winegrowing was taking place, and the Ag Preserve helped Napa's vintners begin taking a leadership role in land stewardship, best farm practices and sustainable agriculture. In recent years, Napa Valley Vintners developed another landmark program, this one called "Napa Green." This forward-thinking land certification program is broken into two parts, Napa Green Land and Napa Green Winery.

Begun in 2003, Napa Green Land environmental certification is largely based on the concept of fish-friendly farming, whereby landowners create a customized farm plan that addresses all aspects of not only the vineyard, but the entire property, by outlining and implementing practices to achieve soil and water conservation, stabilize drainage, enhance riparian corridors and fisheries, and set in place other sustainable, long-term land improvements and environmental protections. This voluntary program aims to curtail erosion, reduce or eliminate pesticide use and encourage all other best practices to ultimately enhance the Napa River watershed and preserve or restore wildlife habitat.

Each step of the process is designed to have measurable effects and is tailored specifically to each unique site; it's not a one-size-fits-all program. The criteria and the outcome are absolutely

relevant to each grower's needs and his or her place in the broader ecological system. Farming never takes place in a vacuum, and the program understands this premise.

Napa Green Land is certified by the National Marine Fisheries Service, California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Certification of a Napa Green Farm Plan ensures compliance with all local, state and federal environmental regulations including the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, California Department of Fish and Game Code and Napa County Conservation Regulations. Currently in Napa County, more than 19,000 acres are enrolled in the program. Nearly 90 percent of the Napa River watershed is in private ownership, making this public/private partnership vital to the long-term viability of the Napa Valley winegrowing community.

As a complement to the Napa Green Land environmental certification, the Napa Valley Vintners has now developed a companion program for Napa Valley's winery production facilities. The Napa Green Winery certification extends Napa Green and the strong track record built with the widely embraced environmental program by continuing the sustainable practices from the vineyard and

land through the winemaking process.

Napa Green Winery is a Napa-specific set of sustainable and green business practices that demonstrates to regulators, distributors, consumers and Napa County citizens that certified wineries are implementing sustainable practices and protecting the environmental quality of the region. Vintners are working closely with regulatory partners, such as the Department of Environmental Management, which serve as third-party certifiers, and using existing green business models as the basis for this comprehensive program. Among the topics addressed by the program are water and materials recycling and energy conservation.

The efforts of Napa Green Winery are aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of wine production facilities as part of the broader view of excellent business. Napa Green Winery certification goes beyond compliance by meeting or exceeding environmental regulations related to winery operations, and helps wineries become more sustainable through economically viable, environmentally sensitive and socially equitable practices.

As more and more wineries work through the certification process, look for the certification mark as a sign of the producer's commitment to the environment.

**The Ag Preserve, with more than 30,000 acres within its domain, marks the first time in the United States that land has ever been set aside specifically for agriculture.**

*Terry Hall is communications director for the Napa Valley Vintners, a nonprofit trade organization representing more than 300 members of the region's winegrowing community. Contact NVV at (707) 963-3388 or visit the website at [www.napavintners.com](http://www.napavintners.com).*