

Coming "Clean" about Sustainable, Organic, Natural and Traditional Wine

3 Key Take-Aways



- 1. Walk the Walk** – Do your homework; educate yourself, your team, and your constituents about practices and definitions; be authentic, be truthful
- 2. Talk the Talk** – Increase visibility by augmenting how and where you communicate; calibrate to your audience; think mobile friendly video, blogs, photos
- 3. Join Forces** – Join organizations or programs to share resources; gather smaller local groups who are working towards similar goals; work together to increase recognition of beneficial approaches to wine growing and making




In the session, **Coming “Clean” About Sustainable, Organic, Natural and Traditional Wine: What Do These Terms Really Mean and How Can Producers Who Embrace Them Work Together**, moderator Kimberly Noelle Charles, founder and owner of Charles Communications Associates, was joined by speakers Allison Jordan, executive director of the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA); Peter Work, winegrower and winemaker at Ampelos Cellars in Lompoc; Brian Freedman, digital writer for Food & Wine, Forbes, and Departures; and Stevie Stacionis, owner of MAMA Oakland restaurant and the Bay Grape wine shop in Oakland.

Jordan kicked off the session with a refresher on the differences between certifications such as sustainable, organic and biodynamic. “There certainly are similarities between all three approaches—soil health, integrated pest management and biodiversity,” she said, “but sustainability covers a much more comprehensive set of issues for things like water, energy efficiency and social equity aspects.”

With climate change an increasingly urgent issue, it’s important to convey how sustainable practices can help mitigate the impacts. “Things like soil management and water use efficiency are related to climate change directly,” Jordan said, “and I think it’s really an effective approach for both mitigating greenhouse gas emissions as well as adapting to change.”

Work, whose winery holds sustainable, organic and biodynamic certifications, uses a variety of strategies to inform trade, media and consumers about Ampelos’ vineyard and

winery practices. “We want to tell everybody about what is inside that bottle,” said Work, who includes the CSWA logo on Ampelos labels, as well as a list of ingredients. “It is so important for us to communicate this message to everybody in the value chain.”

Ampelos also incorporates sustainability messaging into its wine club events. “Before the (pandemic) curtain came down, we would have events at our ranch house where we would take people in the vineyard and talk about our farming, and show them what we do,” he said. “Now we focus a lot on virtual tastings, and we always have a little tidbit on sustainability in every single session to get them to understand why it’s important.”

Freedman spoke about the importance of honesty and transparency in winery messaging—pointing to the “clean wine” movement as an example of what not to do. Pitches he has received have been riddled with inaccuracies, which many consumers accept as facts. “When you define one thing you are also defining its opposite,” he said. Therefore, if you’re calling your wine “clean” because it’s made in a particular way, other wines, by definition, must be dirty.

To combat misinformation, Freeman said, tell the truth about what is in your wines. While there may be some initial concern about certain ingredients listed on a wine label, it gives the winery the opportunity to educate people about their purpose in the winemaking process. “I think the more we break through that, the better,” he said.

Stacionis, whose wine shop highlights eco-friendly wines from independent producers, agreed. “I don’t really care about having nutrition information on wine labels, but I do care to know what specific ingredients might be going into it,” she said. “That would be the biggest first step that we could all take. The wine industry has the capability to be one of the most forward-thinking, trendsetting industries in the world on these topics of diversity and inclusion, and sustainability.”

“It is so important that we take it as an ongoing challenge to keep on educating everybody in the value chain,” said Work, “to get the consumers spending the money to buy the right wines based upon the right principles. We need to keep on telling the stories.”

Wine Institute is the public policy advocacy association of 1,000 California wineries and affiliated businesses working at the state, national and international levels to enhance the environment to responsibly produce, promote and enjoy wine. California wineries are responsible for 81% of U.S wine production and more than 95% of U.S. wine exports. They also contribute \$114 billion annually to the U.S. economy and create 786,000 jobs across the country of which 325,000 are in California, bolstering economies through hospitality, taxes and tourism and enhancing communities through environmental and social sustainability. See: www.wineinstitute.org.