

Organic Wines Uncorked

http://winecountrygeographic.blogspot.com/2016/12/2016-in-review-most-important-stories.html

The Delicious Revolution Will Be Vinified: News and Views on Organically Grown Wine

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Monday, January 2, 2017

2016 in Review: The Most Important Stories of the Year in Organically Grown Wine

2016 is a year that saw exciting new developments - and some bafflingly bad ones - in the world of organically grown wines. Here are some of the top stories, in no particular order.

1. SALES OF ORGANICALLY GROWN WINE ARE BOOMING

Little known fact: organic wine sales are booming. In fact, they're outpacing general wine growth by 300-1000%.

I discovered this while writing an op-ed piece that appears in the new Jan. issue of *Wines and Vines*, one of the leading wine industry publications in the U.S.

The op-ed piece, entitled *The Organic Opportunity: Will the U.S. Wine Industry Miss Out?* launched Jan. 1. (May require a subscription - I can't tell. [Let me know by posting a comment here.]

According to Nielsen data from Nov. 2015-Nov. 2016, the average growth in revenue for all wine sales was 5%. That's due to the "premiumization" of wine (i.e. an increase in consumers' purchases of those \$10-12 bottles versus cheaper wines). For bottles labeled with the word organic (the vast majority of which are made with sulfites) **grew at a rate of 15.3%. That's 300% more.**

By volume, organic outpaced the average growth in wine sales even more. The average increase in wine volume **increased 1.6%** from Nov. 2015 to Nov. 2016. In comparison, the volume of organically grown wine **increased 15.9%**. That's basically ten times higher than the average.

While organic is still a small percentage of the wine market - 1% by volume and 2% by dollars - it's a growing market, and one that's been more lucrative for foreign than domestic producers.

Read the whole story - with more details - on the [WinesandVines.com](#) web site.

2. AMERICA'S LARGEST ORGANICALLY FARMED WINE BRAND - BONTERRA - GREW 20%

The largest "made with organic grapes" wine brand in the U.S., Bonterra had a banner year from 2015-2016, growing 19.6%+, earning it a Hot Brand award from IMPACT magazine, an industry publication. That is ten times faster than the wine industry growth rate average. Fetzer, which owns Bonterra, produces 350,000 cases a year under the Bonterra name and roughly 150,000 additional cases of "made with organic grapes" wines under other brand names.

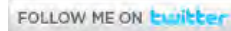
3. MAJOR CENTRAL VALLEY VINTNER DRAMATICALLY INCREASES ORGANIC ACREAGE

The biggest Central Valley story of the year, by far, was the news that Fred Franzia, famous for his Two Buck Chuck wines sold at Trader Joe's, would convert 5,000 of his 40,000 acres of his vines to organic certification to fuel growth of his Rare Earth brand of wines. (In case you were wondering, 40,000 acres is more than all the vineyards in Oregon, which has 28,000 acres of vines.) Franzia is the largest grower in the U.S. and buys even more grapes from other growers.

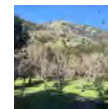


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125 Cowhorns: That's What It Takes to Fuel Montinore Estate's 200+ Acres of Biodynamic Vines
 Montinore Estate's Rudy Marchesi (second from left)

In his keynote at Unified Grape Symposium in 2016, Franzia quoted Nielsen stats that show that wine consumers are interested in trying new things, with 30% of them choosing organic as a new thing they'd like to try.

In the spring, Franzia announced that sales of his Two Buck Chuck (now \$2.99), sold only at Trader Joe's, has surpassed 1 billion bottles (that's 83 million+ cases). But less well known is the fact that Franzia is already the number two producer of organically grown wines in the U.S. under its \$4-5 Green Fin brand (also sold only at Trader Joe's) producing 140,000 cases a year.

The Rare Earth and Green Fin wines are produced under the "made with organic grapes" standard. This category - made with sulfites - has a far larger market share overall than the no added sulfite organic category. (In comparison, Frey's no added sulfite Frey Organic Vineyards wines sell about 100,000 cases a year.)

The required three year certification for the new Bronco organic acreage is expected to be completed in 2017. It would increase the percentage of organic vines in the U.S. from 2.4% to 3%, which is still 2% less than the international average of 5%, but a big step forward.

In the past few years, organic acreage has declined in the U.S. while growing rapidly in Europe. France, for example, is now 9 percent organic.

4. BIODYNAMIC ACREAGE INCREASES TO A NEW HIGH OF 3,404 ACRES IN 2016

Demeter Biodynamic certification is often seen by many as a sort of fringe movement, but by 2016, Demeter (and its organic branch, Stellar Organic Certification) has grown to the the second largest certifier of both organic and Biodynamic vines.

2016 saw the Demeter certification of several large estates - one in Oregon (King Estate, 465 acres) and one in the Sta. Rita Hills in Santa Barbara County (Sea Smoke Cellars, 170 acres).

In addition, areas that had only a tiny Biodynamic presence - Anderson Valley in Mendocino County and Paso Robles in San Luis Obispo County - nearly doubled when more (albeit small) amounts of acreage were certified this year at Domaine Anderson's Dach Vineyard and Villa Creek Cellars estate.

Overall, this shows growing strength for the Biodynamic sector.

In comparison, CCOF, the largest organic certifier by far, certified 10,405 acres of wine grapes, making Demeter the second largest certifier in eco-certified (organic or Biodynamic) vines and wines in the U.S.

In addition to its Biodynamic certification, its Stellar Organic Certification certifies more than 350+ acres on top of the 3,404 acres of Biodynamic vines.

The next largest U.S. wine grape certifiers are Organic Certifiers with 504 acres and Oregon Tilth with 413 acres.

5. KING ESTATE BECOMES THE LARGEST BIODYNAMIC ESTATE IN U.S.

King Estate was the largest organic grower in the U.S. (with 465 acres of planted vines). It was certified in 2002. Now it's the largest Biodynamic grower, too.

Proprietor Ed King says converting to Biodynamics was just the right thing to do.

"I really don't accept the thinking that the "conventional" industry farming standard is "standard," he told me (in as yet unpublished interview). "The reality is that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, their families, the colonists - they were all organic farmers and they were all integrated farms.

"What we are doing is not something that is sort of goofy and edgy on the fringes."

6. NOTED ORGANIC PIONEERS INCREASE ORGANIC VINEYARD ACREAGE

Organic producers in both Anderson Valley and Santa Barbara County increased their organic vineyard acreage.

While many Pinot Noir producers in Oregon have been organic or Biodynamic for decades, Anderson Valley has not. Now it is slowly growing.

The biggest impact in the growth of organic viticulture in the valley, acclaimed for Pinot, is from Long Meadow Ranch, which purchased a Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyard, converting 70 acres to organic certification. The winery has farmed all of its 72 acres of Napa Valley vines organically since 2004.

It joins Handley Cellars, the first estate in Anderson Valley to be certified organic, in a toehold of Anderson Valleyites embracing organic. (Drew Cellars, with 7 acres, is another). Handley, organic

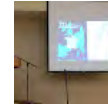
and friends packed cowhorns full of manure last week and then buried them in t...

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Recommended Reading

- Wine and Climate Change
- Organic Winegrowing Manual
- Inventing Wine
- The Fruits of Natural Advantage by Steven Skoll
- Toxic Drift: Pesticides and Health in the Post World War Two South by Pete Daniel
- Napa by James Conaway
- An Ideal Wine by David Darlington
- Sustainable Vineyards in the Watershed
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Wines We Cover

We publish information about wines grown from certified organic or Biodynamic vineyards that are generally *made with sulfites (which are usually added in small amounts to preserve the wine)*.

That includes these certification types:

ORGANIC WINE CERTIFICATIONS

• **Made with Organic Grapes**

Vineyards: certified organic

on its estate vineyards since 2005, has now converted its steep, hillside RSM vineyard, adding 7 acres to its original 29 acres.

Roederer Estate also has 44 acres of organic vines (certified in 2014 and 2015), some of which go into Domaine Anderson wines, and is growing its organic program.

Down south in Santa Barbara County, the regional organic pioneer - Alma Rosa, certified organic since 2000 - has just planted 37 new acres of organic vines on its El Jabali estate, which will come into production in the 2019 vintage.

7. EU'S GLYPHOSATE BATTLES HEAT UP

2016 was a year of consequences in the story of glyphosate, the main ingredient in the popular weedkiller Roundup, an herbicide widely used in the wine industry both in the U.S. and abroad. (In fact, for many North Coast wineries, using the herbicide is the main reason why they are not organic).

Following IARC's 2015 classification of the commonly used herbicide as a probable carcinogen, consumer sentiment grew from mild dismay to passionate grassroots activism to real political clout with the announcement that the herbicide would not be granted a 15 year renewal in the EU, but instead would only be renewed for 18 months.

Since then, the Minister of the Environment in France has called for a complete ban of glyphosate and new French laws are pending on pesticides overall that call for a 25% reduction by 2020. Italy has also restricted its use.

8. GLYPHOSATE IN THE U.S.

After inadvertently leaking a document in the spring showing its (foregone) conclusion that glyphosate was not carcinogenic, the EPA held hearings about glyphosate in December with a scientific advisory panel of experts (who are not EPA staff).

The handpicked review panel was modified due to Monsanto's complaints about one prominent OSHA expert who has opposed a different Monsanto product in a court trial. The EPA bowed to industry pressure to remove epidemiologist Peter Infante from the review panel.

Despite that, during the four days of hearings with the remaining panel members in D.C., there was widespread dissent among the experts over the white paper the EPA staff presented at the review meeting. Science review panel health experts criticized the agency for disallowing what some experts said were well done studies and including others with what they said were dubious findings.

The panel members will weigh in on their assessments in the spring of 2017. At the December session, a number of the experts indicated they would challenge the EPA's white paper findings.

9. CITIZEN GLYPHOSATE TESTING TAKES OFF IN THE U.S.

In 2016 the FDA, under pressure from the GAO, announced it would begin testing common foods for glyphosate. However, its staff could not agree on standardized protocols, and has therefore suspended testing in the meantime.

Two anti GMO nonprofit groups in the U.S. - Food Democracy Now and Moms Across America - made news headlines and TV news for documenting the presence of low levels of glyphosate in food and wine.

The Moms group commissioned an initial study testing glyphosate levels in 10 bottles of wine and found glyphosate ranging from 1 ppb in an organically grown wine to 28 ppb in a chemically farmed wine. With testing costs of only a \$100 per bottle, vintners are now testing to find out the levels in their wines and more citizen testing is expected.

In addition, scientists at UCSF and elsewhere are helping consumers participating in the Detox Project, an initiative launched to monitor glyphosate levels in consumers who want to modify their diets to reduce their glyphosate levels.

Expect more citizen testing campaigns and activism in the new year.

10. IN MENDOCINO, ORGANIC GROWERS ARE BEING PAID LESS FOR ORGANIC GRAPES THAN CONVENTIONAL

In a turn of events that is hard to fathom, growers in Mendocino - a traditional stronghold for growers who sell organic wine grapes (25% of the county's vines are organic) to some of the country's largest producers (Bonterra and Frey) - have found they can get more money from growing conventional wine grapes than organic wine grapes.

Mendocino growers have been complaining in recent years over "opportunistic pricing" for organic grapes, and Bonterra, for one, has beefed up its recruitment efforts in regions like Lodi,

Vinification: less than 100 ppm of sulfites (i.e. a normal range)

Winery: certified organic facility

Labeling: front or back label

• **Ingredients: Organic Grapes**

Vineyards: certified organic

Vinification: up to 350 ppm of sulfites (same as for any non organic wine)

Labeling: back label only

BIODYNAMIC® CERTIFICATIONS

• **Biodynamic Wine**

Vineyards: certified biodynamic

Yeasts: native

Vinification: less than 100 ppm of sulfites; **no additives of any kind**

Winery: certified biodynamic facility

Labeling: front or back label; Demeter logo may appear

• **Made with Biodynamic Grapes**

Vineyards: certified biodynamic

Yeasts: native or organic

Vinification: less than 100 ppm of sulfites; limited number of additives permitted

Winery: certified biodynamic facility

Labeling: front or back

Note: unlike organically grown wines, for which there is a category called "Ingredients: Organic Grapes," wines sourced from biodynamic grapes may not make any biodynamic claim on the bottle label. Bottle labeling is reserved for Demeter certified wines only.

SULFITES IN CONTEXT

According to U.C. Davis, the average among all wines in the U.S. (as well as globally) is 80 ppm.

WHAT THE USDA CALLS ORGANIC WINES

Unlike any other nation, the U.S. oddly imposes a no sulfite restriction on wines in order for them to be called Organic Wine. These wines are also called NSA or NAS wines (which stands for "No Sulfites Added" or "No Added Sulfites.")

From the above description, one can see that there are in fact three types of organically grown wines:

1. Organic Wine (less than 15% of all organically grown wine)
2. Made with Organic Grapes
3. Ingredients: Organic Grapes

The vast majority of wines from organic grapes are labeled Made with Organic Grapes, Ingredients: Organic Grapes or are blended with nonorganic grapes and unlabeled.

Fine winemakers do not generally make wine without sulfites and a number of large wine retailers like BevMo do not sell wine in the category of "USDA Organic Wine."

With rare exceptions, this blog does not cover what the USDA calls "Organic Wine."

We are hopeful that the USDA will revise the categorization of organically grown wines and make NSA or NAS wines a category of their own.

This would put the U.S. in accord with the rest of the world, where "Organic Wine" means a wine from certified grapes made within limits on sulfites (generally under 100-150 ppm).

hoping to get cheaper grapes from growers willing to convert to organic certification there. (Currently there are fewer than 160 acres of organic grapes in Lodi, for example, and those grapes are mainly spoken for by Lodi estate producers).

Back in Mendocino, Bonterra is offering growers new Chardonnay contracts at \$1,075 a ton. Meanwhile, Kendall Jackson and others are offering \$1,300 a ton.

To make matters worse, this comes on the heels of a difficult infestation of leafhoppers in Mendo, which led some longtime organic growers (Masut and others) to revert to farming with pesticides and dropping their organic certification. In 2016, a predator has now been released that effectively attacks the leafhopper, so organic growers are now using this method to contain the pest population. But damage was done in 2015, and no one knows how it will shake out.

11. RAW WINE'S "NATURAL WINE" FAIR LETS U.S. WINE BRANDS USING MOSTLY PESTICIDED WINES EXHIBIT

The RAW wine fair debuted this year in Brooklyn, featuring a wealth of European producers and a small number of U.S. "natural wine" makers. Among the U.S. contingent were several wineries that make almost all of their wines from pesticed vines, violating a major tenet of the natural wine movement. Say wha?

12. TRUMP GIVES KOCH BROTHERS THE EPA OF THEIR DREAMS - SCOTT PRUITT, A CLIMATE CHANGE DENIER AND FOSSIL FUEL ALLY

President-elect Donald Trump announced that Scott Pruitt would be his nominee to head the EPA.

Pruitt is the Oklahoma attorney general and an ally of the fossil fuel industry who has previously filed several lawsuits against the EPA.

Democrats say they will investigate the nominee's financial ties to the fossil fuel industry.

It is not known if Pruitt's appointment (if approved by Congress) will have implications for the EPA ruling on glyphosate and the agency's close relationship with Monsanto.

13. WINE INSTITUTE CONSIDERS BANNING SOME PESTICIDES FROM CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE CERTIFICATION

Details aren't yet clear, but the Wine Institute, an industry group that features a "certified sustainable" certification program for California wineries, may actually be considering adding some prohibitions on the use of the worst, old school pesticides to its (very lax) certification standards. *Currently there are no restrictions on the use of pesticides under the statewide program.*

While adoption of the sustainability program has resulted in many environmental gains (mostly reducing water and energy inputs), the program is often used (abused?) by vintners in marketing efforts - who tend to overstate their greenness.

14. GOOD NEWS: CALIFORNIA PASSES NEW CLIMATE CHANGE LEGISLATION INCLUDING A HEALTHY SOILS INITIATIVE

Leading the way, California passed new climate change legislation this fall, creating and funding a CDFA led new, \$7.5 million **Healthy Soils Initiative**.


This is an important step in the movement to fight climate change through improving agriculture and providing rewards for farmers and growers who contribute to reducing emissions through the way they farm and grow.

The details of just what the initiative will do and how it will be structured are currently under discussion.

The program is being overseen by the Environmental Farming Panel. For more news, [see this coverage from the California Climate and Agriculture Network](#), a leading force in getting the legislation off the ground.

While the new initiative will involve farmers of all kinds, it may offer a chance for organic farmers and growers to be compensated for their soil-friendly farming practices.

Posted by pam strayer at 8:27 PM

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No comments: