

# Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

## Biodynamic Farming

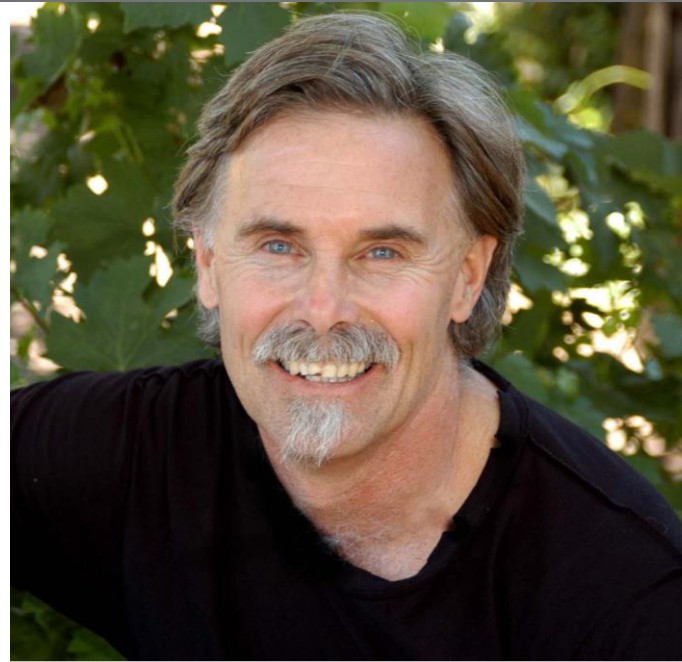
### Benziger Family Winery

Mike Benziger purchased the 85-acre Sonoma Mountain estate that is composed of 29 unique micro-climates and is located outside of Glen Ellen, CA in 1981 and was quickly joined by his parents and six siblings. The operation now employs 24 family members and the entire Benziger portfolio of wines carries a third party certification of organic or green farming practices. The four estate vineyards of the Benziger family operation are Demeter-certified Biodynamic, a certification that only a select handful of North American vineyards have achieved.

### A Holistic Land Management Practice

Mr. Benziger initially employed conventional farming methods but was troubled by the “only vines should be in vineyards” mentality that relied on machinery and pesticides and resulted in silent vineyards devoid of insects, birds, and wildlife. In the mid-1990s, Benziger began to transform his practices receiving sustainable and organic certifications. This transformation saw the elimination of chemical inputs and a switch to the use of compost gathered from 6 Scottish Highlander cows and 75 sheep raised on the property. A healthy 40-acres of polyculture composed of olive trees, cover crops, and insectaries replaced many thirstier plants and vines in areas with excessive water needs were removed. As part of an integrated pest management approach, an “insect garden” is used to attract pest that normally attack vines, and natural enemies of the pests are used to keep the vines safe. A wine cellar cave was created to preclude the need for heating and cooling of the cellar, and lighting was converted to solar power. This hard work paid off and in 2000 Benziger Family Winery became the first certified biodynamic winemaker in Napa and Sonoma counties.

*“It's a life's work to make a wine that is ultimately connected with a place and the people who farm it” –  
Mike Benziger*



### ACHIEVEMENTS

- Recipient of Sunset magazine's 2005 Green Award
- Recipient of California Environmental Protection Agency's 1999 Integrated Pest Management Innovator Award
- Recipient of 2010 Growing Green Award from the Natural Resources Defense Council in the *Water Stewardship* category
- Recycles 2 million gallons of water annually through home-spun wetlands and recycling ponds
- First biodynamic winery in Napa and Sonoma counties





## Demeter Association Inc. - Biodynamic Certification

Alan York, an international expert on Biodynamic farming, has collaborated with Benziger Winery since 1997 and has overseen Biodynamic farming on Benziger's four certified Biodynamic vineyard estates ever since. Biodynamic farming has its roots with Rudolph Steiner who had a far-reaching influence in many areas of philosophy and education, but in the wine field he is known for his belief in the self-contained "farm organism." Biodynamic agriculture views the farm as a self-contained, self-sustaining ecosystem responsible for creating and maintaining its individual health and vitality without any external or unnatural additions. Emphasis is placed on the integration of crops and livestock, recycling of nutrients, soil maintenance, and the health and well-being of the animals, the farmer, the farm, and the earth: all are integral parts that make up the whole. In 2002, the USDA implemented the National Organic Farming Program to provide a uniform definition of organic farming. The Demeter Farm Standards utilize these standards along with the USDA accreditation as its base requirements such that all Demeter Biodynamic Certified producers are legally certified as organic.

*"My family and I believe Biodynamic farming is the best way to craft wines with personality that promote a healthy environment and authentically reflect the variety, vintage, estate and passion of the people who make them."*  
– Mike Benziger



### PROJECT PARTNERS

Alan York

California Environmental Protection Agency

Demeter Association Inc.

Natural Resources Defense Council

Stellar Certification Services



## PROJECT DETAILS

### Farming for Flavors

In 2007 Benziger winery had the distinction of having all 50 of its growers certified as sustainable, organic, or biodynamic. As part of this process a certification program called Farming for Flavors was created by Benziger Winery in 2005. This program is a unique and customized quality assurance program that seeks to challenge growers to create grapes with strong character and distinctive flavor through environmentally sound practices. The program uses a Distinct Quality Point Assessment to rate growers on an annual basis and is overseen by Demeter Association's Stellar Certification Services, a third party certifying agency. Growers must improve both the health of their land and the quality of their grapes to continue to receive the certification and the bar required for certification is continually being raised.

### Water Conservation

Benziger Winery takes a holistic approach to managing its land and its water conservation efforts are particularly noteworthy. Annually 2-3 million gallons of waste water are collected in onsite ponds that flow into constructed wetlands that filter and oxygenate the water. The water is then used for irrigation and landscaping. Careful selection of grapes varieties that match the compost fed soils save up to 50% of the water needed for irrigation as the roots of the vines penetrate further into the ground reaching more permanent water sources. In the actual wine making process, close to a 20% reduction in water use was achieved by switching to "all-vibration technology" that eliminates much of the need for cleaning with water. A steam based barrel cleaner has reduced the amount water used to clean a barrel from 25 gallons to below 5 gallons.

### Spreading the Message

The Benziger's are active advocates of sustainable and organic farming practices who help to educate their employees, growers, and the public. They hold bimonthly viticulture classes and quarterly seminars on low-input farming. Public tours of the winery educate about integrated pest management techniques and focus on their low-input method of grape growing.

For more information please contact:

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