

Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

Soil Conservation and Biodiversity

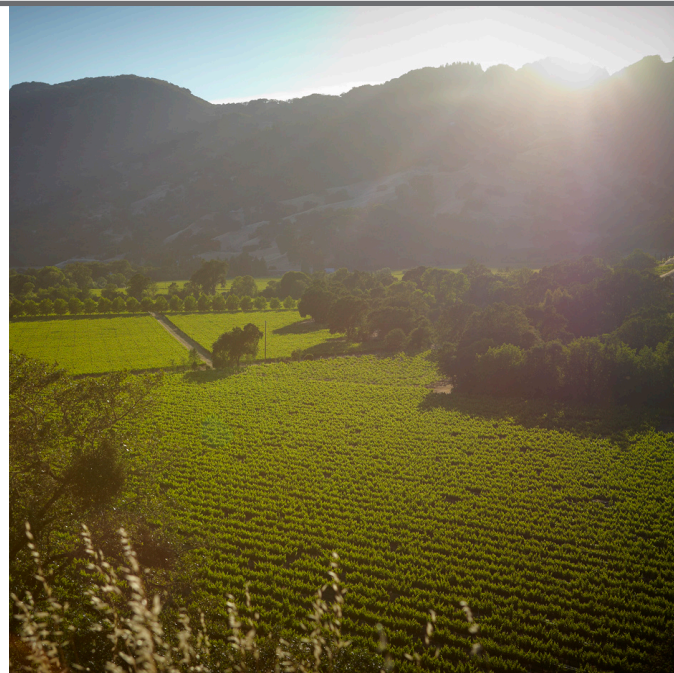
FETZER AND BONTERRA VINEYARDS

Barney and Kathleen Fetzer started Fetzer Vineyards with the help of their eleven children in 1968. The family started farming grapes conventionally and in 1987 Fetzer started to transition their vineyards to organic production. Three years later Fetzer released the first bottle of Bonterra wine made from organic grapes. Bonterra is currently the largest producer of certified organic wine grapes in the U.S. and the number one seller of organic wines made in the U.S. Bonterra and Fetzer Vineyards encompass a total of 960 acres in Mendocino County.

SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING

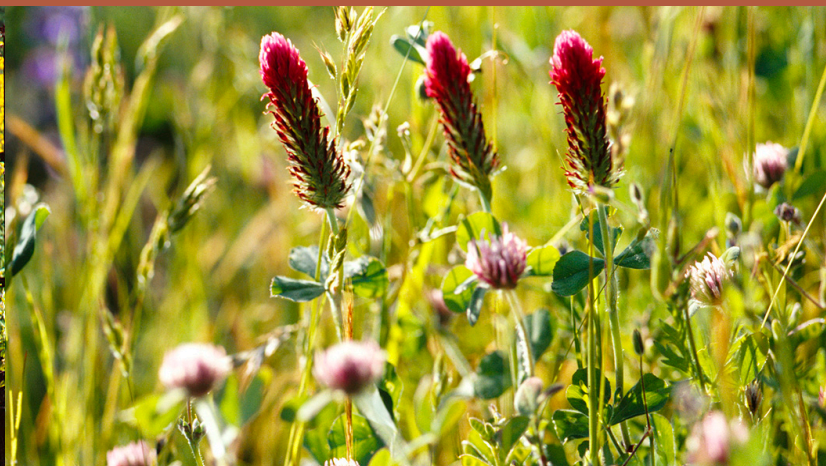
In addition to being both CCOF (California Certified Organic Farmers) certified organic on all of their vineyards in Mendocino County, and Demeter certified Biodynamic® on three of their ranches (McNab, Butler and Blue Heron), Fetzer and Bonterra vineyards have contributed to sustainability in winegrowing with an impressive list of accomplishments. The Fetzer winery in Hopland uses 100% renewable energy to supply the electricity that powers winery operations and as a result they have lowered greenhouse gas emissions at their winery by approximately 1,500 tons per year. Fetzer Vineyards has an employee bike-share and commuter van program to decrease their use of vehicle fuel and further reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Fetzer has also been tracking their waste for an impressive 23 years during which time they have reduced their solid waste going to the landfill by 97.5%

“Many Fetzer employees are actively involved in creating a ‘culture of sustainability’ while also maintaining a commitment to producing quality wine.” - Ann Thrupp, Senior Sustainability Advisor



ACHIEVEMENTS

- Certified by California Certified Sustainable Winegrowing Program (CCSW).
- Integrated Pest Management Innovator Award, California Dept. of Pesticide Regulation, Bonterra 2010 and Fetzer 2004
- Governor’s Environmental and Economic Leadership Award (GEELA) 2003 and in the Outstanding Leadership Category, 2008
- Best-of-the-Best Ozone Protection Award, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2007



“At Fetzer, sustainability is a way of life and a cornerstone for our business”

Photos courtesy of McNab Ranch, Bonterra Vineyards



Butler Ranch

"There's certified organic and then there's the spirit of organic – our grapes are 100% of both. Organic certification means we don't use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers and we go through significant auditing every year to make sure all of our practices meet or beat USDA regulations...The spirit of organic is a proactive approach that places us in tune with the vines and the land, observing their cues and anticipating what they need." Bonterra Philosophy

PROJECT PARTNERS

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, UC Cooperative Extension and The California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance

Soil Management at Fetzer and Bonterra Vineyards

BEGINNINGS

Wine quality is dependent upon the *terroir*, the growing practices, and vintner technique. The concept of the French term *terroir* refers to the soil type, geography, geology and climate of a region that give special characteristics to agricultural products. The taste of a wine is influenced by the nutrients contained in the soil and to continue producing flavorful wines and wine grapes soil management is key. Fetzer and Bonterra have implemented a variety of soil management practices such as cover cropping, composting, drainage systems and conservation tillage for the purpose of reducing soil erosion while also promoting carbon storage and soil quality. Healthy soil leads to adequate soil drainage and helps to eliminate both soil born diseases and irrigation inefficiencies.

PROJECT DETAILS

Between 2006 and 2007 Fetzer and Bonterra collaborated with the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (<http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.org/>) and UC Cooperative Extension on a study to document the benefits of biodiversity and identify practices for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in and around vineyards. The project was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The vineyards participated in documenting the effects of the habitat restoration practices, hedgerows, and cover cropping to attract valuable ecosystem services, such as beneficial insects that help to control pests.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Fetzer and Bonterra plant different mixes of cover crops along their vineyard floors to fix nitrogen, control soil vigor, attract beneficial insects and reduce runoff. The placement of sheep and chickens throughout the vineyards assists with weed control, soil fertility, and controlling typical pests such as cutworms and beetles. Fetzer makes a minimum of 2,000 tons of compost annually from leftover grape skins, seeds, and stems to provide valuable soil nutrients. Compost from their operation is used as an amendment once a year on most blocks for increasing soil organic matter and soil analysis and monitoring periods occur every 2-3 years to evaluate soil nutrient levels.

FOSTERING SUCCESS

In 2009 Fetzer began participating in an additional third-party sustainability certification program called Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing that is also part of the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance. Fetzer has an employee led safety program with an initiative called C.A.R.E (Communication, Awareness, Reward and Education) that includes safety training sessions, research projects, and infrastructure to ensure safety at work. They also offer employee educational opportunities, language classes and scholarship support for both employees and their families.

For more information please contact: