

# Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

## Renewable Energy

### VINO FARMS

Vino Farms is a multi-generational farming operation owned by the Ledbetter family. They are headquartered in California's San Joaquin Valley and they own and manage over 15,000 acres of winegrapes throughout the state. Vino Farms operates its vineyards with meticulous attention to detail and environmental sustainability. The Ledbetter family was named the first recipient of the Grower of the Year award during the 2011 Unified Wine & Grape Symposium for their adoption of sustainable farming practices throughout their operations. One of the many reasons for these honors is the Ledbetter's dedication to renewable energy.

### WINE, FARMING, AND SUSTAINABILITY

In 2007, the Ledbetters converted one of their 4,800 acre operation's truck and tractor fleet to biodiesel. Biodiesel is the only alternative fuel to have completed the health effects testing of the 1990 Clean Air Act. In 2008, Vino Farms installed a 30 kilowatt solar array to operate an irrigation pump on 221 acres of winegrapes, as well as a 22-acre restoration site. Going solar was more than just an economic decision for the operation, says Craig Ledbetter, it is also part of a deep-seated belief in sustainability and protecting the environment.

*"We see what's coming down the pipeline with carbon sequestration, and all those kinds of things, and we want to continue to be in front of that." Craig Ledbetter of Vino Farms*



photos by Randy Caparosa

### ACHIEVEMENTS

Conversion of truck and tractor fleet to B20 Biodiesel engines- cutting emissions by 50% on 4,800 acres of farmland operations.

Installation of solar array which powers the irrigation system of a 22 acre restoration site and 221 acres of vineyard as well as the domestic water for the vineyard manager's house and storage sheds saving over 400,000 pounds in greenhouse gases to date.



photos by Randy Caparosa



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Water and energy are joined at the hip. About 19% to 20% of California's power goes to treat, move or process water- Jim Tischer of the Center for Irrigation Technology at CSU Fresno



## Vino Farms and a Whole Farm Approach at Grand Vin Lands

### BEGINNINGS

The farming operation was started by Keith Ledbetter in the early 1970s in the Lodi region of California. Soon thereafter, Keith's youngest son Jim came to work for Vino Farms after attending Fresno State University. Keith's oldest son, John, also a graduate of Fresno State, joined the company in 1979. It was in the next 15 years that Vino Farms expanded to other counties and developed partnerships with various companies to increase the size of the operation. Since then, John's son, Craig, his daughter Kim and Jim's daughter Marissa have come to work for the company.

### PROJECT DETAILS

Vino Farms's pilot program site for sustainable farming is a 221 acre vineyard on the far western edge of Lodi's Mokelumne River known as Grand Vin Lands. The Ledbetter's have utilized the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) which has provided Vino Farms with cost share funding to replace furrow irrigation with drip, implement various IPM (Integrated Pest Management) strategies as well as implement riparian restoration on 22 acres along the river.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Grand Vin Land's manager Chris Storm worked with the Stockton NRCS field office and the San Joaquin County Resource Conservation District (RCD) for technical assistance in irrigation water management, IPM, and cover crop systems for their vineyards. The Center for Land-Based Learning coordinated much of the restoration project planting with the help of students in the SLEWS program (Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship). Vino Farms also worked with the Center for Irrigation Technology at CSU Fresno and USDA Rural Development to help plan and implement the solar array for Grand Vin Lands.

### MANAGEMENT

Vino Farms is a family business that thinks seriously about the needs of future generations of land stewards. "Sustainability is all about growing healthy grapes to make higher quality wines," explains Storm, "which sustains the business."

### FOSTERING SUCCESS

The Ledbetter family and Vino Farms were instrumental in the development and implementation of the Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing program. As the first third-party sustainable programs in the winegrape industry, Lodi Rules set an example for the industry as a whole.

*"They are committed to quality, the environment and their people- and they're involved in the industry." Nat DiBudo, president of the Allied Grape Growers*

### PROJECT PARTNERS

Center for Irrigation Technology at CSU Fresno, USDA Rural Development, San Joaquin Resource Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Center for Land-Based Learning