

The

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# Exploring the PNW Wineries' Ongoing Commitment to Sustainability Practices

By: Becky Garrison

**T**he Pacific Northwest wine community's ethos to care for the land and community can be traced back to the pioneering settlers who traveled to the Oregon Territory and began planting grapes in the 1840s. In recent years, a growing number of these wineries have obtained various sustainability certifications that demonstrate their ongoing commitment to social and environmental performance, public transparency, and accountability.

For example, stewardship has been a key principle at Willamette Valley Vineyards (Turner, Oregon) since its inception in 1983. They were part of the

founding of Low Input Viticulture and Enology (LIVE), a 501(c)(3) non-profit that supports environmentally and socially responsible winegrowing through third-party certification and educational programming.

Also, their winery was the first in the world to use cork certified through Preferred by Nature to FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council) standards. In addition, they were the first winery to deploy a UV-C Light robot in their vineyard to prevent powdery mildew, as well as one of the founding signatories of Willamette Valley Oak Accord, a grassroots effort to protect and restore the remaining oak habitat in



## In The Winery

the Willamette Valley.

Other environmental measures implemented by Willamette Valley Vineyards include becoming certified Salmon-Safe, partnering with Pacific Gas & Electric to provide wind-powered electricity, investing in four solar energy projects with Advanced Energy Systems and partnering with Revino to use reusable glass bottles. It also adopted a new lightweight bottle design for nationally distributed wines that “precycles” glass by using less material to produce a bottle, and it prints new labels on the nationally distributed wines on (FSC®) certified paper made from 100 percent recycled paper.

### Willamette Valley's B Corp™ Certified Wineries

The lengthy process to achieve B Corp certification requires an evaluation of social and environmental factors, including customer satisfaction, transparency, environmental footprint, employee well-being and relationships with local suppliers and community leaders. As per the B Lab website: “B Corp certification doesn’t just prove where companies excel now — it also commits companies to their mission for the long term.”

The latest files from the Oregon Wine Board dated 2020 list eight B Corp-certified wineries in Oregon's Willamette Valley, more than any other state. When asked why this region has such a preponderance of B Corp-certified wineries, Caitlin Shawver, director of marketing for Sokol Blosser Winery (Dayton), points to the unique pioneering spirit in the Willamette Valley that started with the founders of the first wineries, which included Susan Sokol Blosser and Bill Blosser.

*“Their independent spirit led them to plant grapes here, even when many people told them they were crazy,” she said. “Deep respect for the land and the surrounding environment was a priority then — and it still is now with the second generation at the helm.”*

In 2014, A to Z Wineworks (Newberg) became the first U.S.-based B Corp winery. Ivanna Tucker, the associated digital marketing manager, commented on the advantages of achieving this certification from an industry perspective.

*“B Corps believe in using business as a force for*

*good, a position that is valuable to customers who care about where their products come from and the business practices behind them,” she said.*

The Stoller Wine Group (Dayton) is a collection of family-owned wine brands based in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, with their brands Stoller Family Estate and Chehalem Winery achieving B Corp certification. In addition, it became the world's first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold-certified winery in 2006. Hannah Guth, communications specialist for Stoller Family Estates, pointed to how this certification serves as their North Star, guiding their business decisions and reinforcing their commitment to preserving the Stoller family legacy by protecting the environment and uplifting the community. In her estimation, the advantage of B Corp certification goes far beyond environmental stewardship.

*“It evaluates how we treat our employees through competitive compensation, comprehensive benefits and ongoing opportunities for growth,” Gunth noted. “By aligning our B Corp principals, we not only create a more sustainable future in the vineyard but also build a thriving workplace and community that truly reflects the core values of Stoller Family Estate.”*

Shawver from Sokol Blosser Winery highlighted additional advantages of becoming a B Corp.

*“We're able to retain top talent, because people love working for B Corp companies, and our customers, distributors and accounts love supporting B Corp companies by buying our wines and visiting our estate, which includes our LEED-certified barrel cellar,” she said. “An additional benefit is that as a B Corp, we have a unique opportunity to collaborate with other B Corps outside of our industry.”*

Following Sokol Blosser Winery receiving B Corp Certification in 2015, B Lab Global honored them as a four-time winner for “Best for The World: Environment in 2022,” as well as awarding them “Best for the World: Changemakers” in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Other Willamette Valley B Corp Certified wineries and vineyards include Brooks Wine (Amity), Et Fille Wines (Newberg), Soter Vineyards (Carlton) and Winderlea Vineyard and Winery (Dundee), with Elk Cove Vineyards (Gaston) awaiting final approval of



their B Corp certification.

### Oregon's Demeter USA Biodynamic® Vineyards & Wineries

Even though Oregon only produces one percent of the wines made in the United States, this state accounts for 52 percent of total vineyard acres that received biodynamic® certification from Demeter USA. This not-for-profit offers biodynamic certification to farms.

For those unfamiliar with biodynamic practices, these wineries follow practices that Rudolph Steiner set forth in 1924, based on the teachings of the ancient Persian philosopher Zoroaster. In 1985, Demeter International formalized these practices, which follow organic principles by prohibiting the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. Additional measures include utilizing eight specific treatments, called preparations, comprising medicinal plants, minerals, and composted animal manures. Furthermore, a certified biodynamic farm must dedicate at least 10 percent of the farm's total acreage to biodiversity.

Moe Momtazi, founder of Momtazi Vineyards & Maysara Winery (McMinnville), is a modern-day conservationist and an ancient Persian philosopher. Maysara means "house of wine" in Persian, a definition that aligns with Momtazi's view of wine not as a commercial commodity but as a living spirit that springs from the marriage of the sun and the earth. After leaving his homeland in 1982, following the Iranian Revolution, he purchased 496 (now 532) acres of abandoned wheat farm. Even though this land had been deemed unsuitable for planting finicky pinot noir grapes, Momtazi knew that by employing his family's vineyard practices that embodied biodynamic farming principles, he could produce pinot noir wine using holistic means. This includes growing a variety of medicinal flowers and herbs, as well as even selecting weeds to make compost teas that harness the beneficial properties of each plant. These teas work in tandem to maintain long-term vine and soil health without the use of any harmful chemicals.

His instincts proved to be spot-on, as wines produced using grapes from his Demeter Certified Biodynamic vineyard continue to garner accolades. As evidence of his reach, Momtazi sold pinot noir

grapes to 18 wineries following the 2024 harvest, with Mark Vlossak of St. Innocent Winery (Jefferson) having the distinction of being the first winemaker to sell a bottle of Momtazi Vineyard wine nationally back in 2006.

According to Vlossak, *"The unique umami texture, the savory spice and blue-black fruit set it apart as a unique terroir that I love, as well as the family behind the vines."*

Others who purchase their grapes from Momtazi concur, such as Tracy Kendall, who considers Momtazi a long-time mentor.

*"No matter the vintage, there is always a feral quality to the wine, a wildness that is very unique,"* she opined.

When she left Nicolas-Jay (Newberg) and launched Folly of Man (Amity) with her husband, Aaron, they decided to continue purchasing fruit from Momtazi, with her first vintage slated for release in March 2025.

Also, John Adams of Wildsound Wines (McMinnville) met Momtazi while filming the 2024 James Beard award-winning documentary *SOMM: Cup of Salvation*, which included the Momtazi family.

*"Moe has a quote in the film that always sticks with me: 'Wine is the sun's radiance in liquid form',"* Adams reflected.

According to Craig Camp, winegrower for Troon Vineyard (Applegate Valley), biodynamics is the best route to building nature's natural systems in their soil and vines, which would then be expressed in their wines. In his experience, farming biodynamically requires great discipline, planning, and organization.

*"You must always be ahead of any problems you may face, as you can't simply add chemicals when some vineyard problems get out of control,"* he stated.

In addition to the environmental benefits of biodynamic farming, Brent Stone, co-CEO and winemaker of King Estate Winery (Eugene), notices how there's a segment of the wine-consuming public that seeks out products made using sustainable



means, which provides them with an opportunity to offer education about the value and benefits of choosing biodynamic wines.

*"It's still rare to find a nationally distributed biodynamic wine brand, so we can meet that need in the market and hopefully be part of growth in that segment,"* he opined.

In a similar vein, Domaine Willamette (Dayton), home to Demeter-certified Bernau Estate Vineyard, opened in 2022 with a vision to build an iconic biodynamic winery that will surprise and delight visitors with moments of celebration and relaxation around bubbles and food pairings. Currently, they biodynamically farm 26 acres of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier for méthode traditionnelle sparkling and still wine production. Other certifications include LIVE and Salmon-Safe.

### Sustainable Washington

While Oregon may have the most B Corp and biodynamic wineries in the United States, neighboring Washington State has created its own certification titled "Sustainable WA." About a third of Washington State's acreage is certified as Sustainable WA or is in the process of becoming certified. At present, this is only a vineyard certification. However, wineries may put the Sustainable WA logo on their bottles of wine if 75 percent of the winegrapes in that bottle are certified Sustainable WA.

Marissa Dineen of Dineen Vineyards in The Hills growing region of the Yakima Valley found this program serves as a hallmark of quality by assuring wine buyers, through a rigorous third-party audit, that the grapes that make the wine in their glass uphold high standards. Also, this certificate drives the Washington State wine industry to adopt best-in-class practices in viticulture, people management and business management and foster the long-term health of the industry. In particular, Dineen observes how sustainability and responsible business practices resonate with younger consumers, who are a key demographic they aim to introduce to wine and develop into lifelong enthusiasts.


*"If sustainably grown wine inspires them to try or buy the product, that is a win,"* Dineen said. *"That said, we need to better educate consumers on the concept and value of sustainability to ensure the*

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*message connects and drives purchasing decisions. Younger consumers understand, and it fits within their values set — they are early adopters."*

### Sustainable Winegrowing BC

Similar to Washington State, British Columbia wineries can participate in a regional certification program. The mission of Sustainable Winegrowing BC (SWBC) is to guide wineries and grape growers in BC that enable and encourage them to practice good land stewardship, offer safe fulfilling employment and be respectful neighbors.

Lyndsay O'Rourke, owner/winemaker of Tightrope Winery (Penticton), believes that the SWBC logo on a bottle should give consumers confidence that the producer follows accepted sustainability practices and has undergone an audit and certification process. Currently, six winery members and 36 vineyard members located in BC are fully certified, with another couple dozen working towards becoming certified.