



# Sustainable Winegrowing Australia

## Supporting the nation's growers and winemakers in demonstrating and improving their sustainability

The Australian wine industry's unified sustainability program, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, was launched in July 2019. In this column **Mardi Longbottom** addresses some of the most common questions about the program.

### *How long has the Australian wine industry been working on sustainability initiatives?*

The Australian wine industry has a long history of research and development and sustainable management of vineyards and wineries. In the 1990s, the Cooperative Research Centre for Viticulture developed some foundational resources on sustainable production, components of which are still used today.

In 2009, Entwine Australia, a national sustainability program for winegrape growers and wineries, was launched by the Winemakers' Federation of Australia (now Australian Grape & Wine) with funds from the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation (now Wine Australia) and the Australian Government 'Caring for our Country' program. The management of Entwine Australia transferred to the AWRI in August 2015. At this time, new features including the Australian wine carbon calculator, benchmarking capacity and best practice workbooks for vineyards and wineries were integrated into Entwine with the support of the Australian Government and Treasury Wine Estates.

Concurrently, sustainability systems were developed in numerous regions including Margaret River, Yarra Valley, Murray Valley, Adelaide Hills, Hunter Valley and McLaren Vale. In 2013 the McLaren Vale Grape, Wine & Tourism Association (MVGWTA) re-launched its 'Generational Farming' program online as 'Sustainable Australia Winegrowing (SAW)' with support from the South Australian Government through PIRSA, Wine Australia and several other regions.

In 2017, a global review of the sustainability landscape found that Australia had the building blocks for a world-class sustainability program and recommended merging the best features of existing programs into a single, united program that can be supported by the entire industry. On 1 July 2019, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia was launched. The program currently has more than 600 vineyard and winery members across 43 Australian wine regions.

### *What's involved in being a member of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia?*

Sustainable Winegrowing Australia membership is available to all Australian

winegrape growers and wineries. Each year all members report a set of business metrics including production volume, water, energy and fertiliser use, economic performance, waste volumes and biodiversity area, and complete a self-assessment of their practices through the Sustainable Winegrowing Australia online interface. The self-assessment workbook covers all of the areas above in addition to pest and disease management, chemical use, business practices, community impact and environmental action planning.

### *What are the benefits of membership?*

Sustainable Winegrowing Australia membership provides benchmarking tools and resources to enable planning, evaluation, control and communication. Members report that the most valuable part of the program is the ability to benchmark their performance against other members. All members can compare their data and workbook responses based on business size, region, zone, state, national and climate zone. The benefit of annual benchmarking is that members can identify inefficiencies and, if practices are changed and performance is improved, profitability can also be improved. ▶



The Sustainable Winegrowing Australia database is also useful to track and visualise changes in resource usage over time. Members report that being able to relate past performance to seasonal conditions or changes in management is highly valuable. For example, growers have reported reduced fuel use in drier seasons which required fewer sprays than in other years. Others, especially wineries, can clearly see a decline in electricity use after the installation of solar panels.

Historical datasets are valuable assets that can also be used to review vineyard and winery practices and the effectiveness of continuous improvement initiatives. They are useful for short- and long-term business planning and can be used as a communication tool within the business or externally in business transactions with financial organisations, insurers, investors, in negotiating grape and wine sales or when selling a property.

The workbooks of vineyard and winery practices guide members through a

self-assessment of their practices. The completion of the annual workbook offers members an opportunity to annually review these practices and provide direction for targeted areas for improvement within their business.

#### *What is third-party certification?*

Third-party certification is the assessment of a business's performance against a standard by an independent body. Certified members of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia are independently certified by voluntarily undergoing a triennial, third-party audit against the Australian Wine Industry Standards of Sustainable Practice (AWISSP). The AWISSP has been developed and updated over the past 10 years by incorporating feedback from winegrape growers and wineries, and in consultation with trainers, auditors and technical experts. The standard is independently maintained by Freshcare Ltd.

#### *What are the benefits of certification?*

There are a number of different reasons businesses choose to become certified. For some it is useful to have an independent body review their processes and this provides an additional layer of confidence in their operations and planning. For others it is important to have independent verification of their sustainability claims so that they can confidently communicate their credentials with their supply chain. Being part of a recognised sustainability program is an important factor for many members and certification is a formal acknowledgement of the business's commitment to the program and to sustainable practices.

For more information on Sustainable Winegrowing Australia or any other grapegrowing and winemaking technical matters, contact the AWRI helpdesk at [helpdesk@awri.com.au](mailto:helpdesk@awri.com.au) or on 08 8313 6600. **GW**

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