

THE IN'S AND OUT'S OF BENZIGER'S BIODYNAMIC WINERY

The property now encompassing the Benziger Family Winery was once the site of an outrageous experiment to create a cabernet-infused marijuana strain called “Sonoma Coma.” Although the pot production ceased once the property was sold to the Benzigers, the 1970’s vibe of health, harmony, and environmental philosophy continues under its new ownership. The Benziger family’s commitment to biodynamic farming has rocked the world of wine-making and made Benziger a leader in sustainable agriculture.



Biodynamic farming is an environmentally-holistic approach to agriculture, and operates on the belief that a farm should be treated like a natural ecosystem.

Adherence to this belief led to Benziger being certified by the Demeter Biodynamic Trade Association in 2000. Seven years later, all their wines were certified as either organically, sustainably, or bio dynamically-produced. There are 4 primary areas that the Benzigers focused on to achieve their winery's harmonic biodiversity and quality wines:

- Climate Adaptation;
- Soil Revitalization;
- Water Management; and
- Nutrient Application and Pest Control

The Sonoma County landscape is made up of micro-climates, each of which exhibits different degrees of solar exposure, moisture content, and temperature. Different varieties of grapes will be better suited for certain micro-climates over others. By allowing the region to dictate what is grown, monoculture crops are avoided, and individualism within the wine emerges.



Closely linked to micro-climates is the concept of geological terroir. Knowing terroir is crucial in biodynamics because it is the medium for plant growth and determinant of what types of grapes should be grown. Benziger Estate is surrounded by a terroir of nutrient, which are perfect for the vertical root growth of nine unique varietals on the property. Some commercial growers alter the terroir of their property to produce a single varietal, which can result in J-shaped roots that do not penetrate deep enough to stabilize the plant or extract nutrients.

In order to help revitalize soils, combat pests, and prevent plant disease, Benziger incorporates animals and insects into the biodynamic farming process. Manure from sheep and cattle provide a free source of fertilizer, while predatory insects fend off pests that cause plant disease. There is an on-site insectary where, among other creatures, lady bugs can safely breed and thrive. Livestock also act as alternatives to gas-powered mowers in maintaining cover crops and eradicating invasive plants.



Normally, a winery would need to install a filtration system to collect excess water from its facilities. In the case of the Benziger winery however, a series of small wetlands and ponds were engineered to collect and filter runoff from production areas while adding to the biodiversity of the property. This natural filtration process is governed by the botanical properties of wetland vegetation that absorbs chemicals such as nitrogen and phosphorous. Following this stage, the water is pumped through a series of gravel and sand-lined ponds that are used to separate out any suspended solids.

Benziger Family Winery produces approximately 120,000 cases of wine per year using their biodynamic farming framework. They are a member of DBTA's list of 450 certified growers, and take pride in their reputation as an environmentally-conscious winery and global distributor. In the end though, it's the selfless love of wine that makes Benziger strive to protect the environment that continues to produce it.



Source: <http://www.globalsiteplans.com/environmental-design/the-ins-and-outs-of-benzigers-biodynamic-winery/>