

Natural Winegrowing at Inman Family Wines

In July, 2000, we planted just over seven acres of Pinot Noir, as well as a small amount of Pinot Gris, on our ten-acre, Olivet Grange property on Olivet Road in the Russian River Valley, a cool-climate region in western Sonoma County renowned for its Burgundian grape varieties.

From the outset, we have been committed to employing environmentally responsible, sustainable farming practices in our vineyard and natural winemaking techniques in our production facility. This approach is designed to ensure that Inman Family wines express the true character of the grape and place from which they are made.

Sensitive and Sustainable Farming

In developing our Olivet Grange vineyard, we preserved the majestic oak trees that grace the property and avoided sterilizing the soil, in order to maintain its natural ecology. Today, we use only organic fertilizers in the vineyard. Among these is "Four-Course Compost," so named because it derives from table scraps discarded by high-end San Francisco restaurants and hotels such as Aqua, The Slanted Door, Boulevard, The Fairmount, Farallon, Hotel Nikko, Jardinière, Lulu, Sheraton Place, Tadich Grill, and the Westin St. Francis. Recently, San Francisco households have been able to contribute their food scraps to the program by curbside collection with bio-diesel fueled trucks. Kathleen Inman recently joined Mayor Gavin Newsom to promote urban composting. In addition to being a nutrient-rich alternative to synthetic fertilizers, the gourmet compost helps us form a perfect loop from table to earth and back again, in the form of sustainably produced wines that enhance the meals providing the raw materials to renew the cycle. Our use of this compost has been featured in Fortune Magazine, on local SF television and on a Discovery Channel program called "Green Planet."

We also use worm castings, obtained from Sonoma Valley Worm Farm, to create an easily assimilated bio-fertilizer rich in nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. The castings enhance the soil's ability to absorb atmospheric moisture, aiding water economy and aeration. The castings are brewed to form microbial teas through our drip irrigation system. These are Applied three times a year, the teas introduce a diverse spectrum of beneficial microorganisms that improve soil and plant health and aid the vines' natural resistance to pests and disease. All of these products are certified organic.

To further promote a healthy ecosystem, we have planted permanent cover crops, which have the side benefit of producing higher quality grapes by forcing the vines to compete for water and soil nutrients, resulting in smaller berries with more concentrated flavors. (Close vine spacing – 6'x 4' in our vineyard – also promotes more flavorful grapes.)

Once cover crops are established, simple mowing keeps the vineyard tidy and well-groomed. Because there is no tilling of the soil, the vineyard requires less use of fossil fuel for tractor use, and its population of earthworms is preserved. Cover crops also mitigate soil erosion from wind and rain and serve as habitats for beneficial insects that feed on vine pests such as mites and leafhoppers, minimizing the use of pesticides.

Since 2002, we have used only organic fungicides (sulfur, copper, Serenade, Sonata and organic Stylet oil). Our weeds are removed manually. In 2005 we began to augment our organic farming with some biodynamic farming techniques, namely using the lunar calendar to make decisions on pruning, thinning, and harvest. However, because our farm is relatively small it would be difficult for us to create a totally closed system (raising the food for animals which would then supply the manure for the many prescribed preparations), and therefore we are unlikely to ever be biodynamically certifiable. Instead, we simply refer to ourselves as "lunatics"!

