



Oregon Launches Statewide Certification for Sustainable Wine

Program intended to convey a clearer message about wineries' "green" practices to consumers

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If you've ever gone to the store hoping to buy a "green" wine, you may have been puzzled by the various logos on labels—National Organic Program, Demeter, LIVE, Salmon Safe and others. What is the difference between them? Is one better than another? And how much do they differ from wineries that don't have certification but claim to follow natural farming practices?

To address customer confusion about organic, biodynamic and sustainability certifications, the Oregon Wine Board has introduced a new way to convey a unified message about local wineries' practices. Called Oregon Certified Sustainable Wine (OCSW), the program guarantees that any wine carrying its logo meets three key criteria: It is made using environmentally responsible agricultural practices and responsible winemaking practices, and those are verified by an independent, third-party certifying agency.

Begun in 2008, the OCSW program is a response to wine drinkers seeking out sustainably produced wines, according to Oregon Wine Board executive director Ted Farthing. "These same consumers didn't want to be overwhelmed by the details and nuances," he said, noting that wineries often got bogged down in the technical details when describing their efforts. "It doesn't need to be complicated."

Luisa Ponzi, winemaker at [Ponzi](#) Vineyards, agrees that clarity was the goal. "We felt it would be more effective if we found one certification that encompassed and found common ground with all of the others," said Ponzi. Her family's winery has long farmed sustainably and participated in the OCSW pilot program. Ponzi will start with three OCSW-labeled wines, its 2008 Arneis, Chardonnay and Riesling.

So far, 11 wineries, which produce a total of about 37,500 cases annually, have earned the OCSW certification, among them some of the state's most familiar names and those already well known for their sustainable practices. In addition to Ponzi, these include: [Adelsheim](#), [Amity](#),

[Anne Amie](#), [Bethel Heights](#), [Cristom](#), [Montinore](#), [Panther Creek](#), Ponzi, [WillaKenzie](#), [Willamette Valley Vineyards](#) and [Wooldridge Creek](#). A handful of other wineries are in the process of certification.

The first wines to carry the OCSW logos will be some 2008 whites being released this summer. The program won't hit critical mass until next spring, when more wines, including the state's more prestigious Pinot Noirs, are available on store shelves.

For those who do want more details about exactly what the OCSW certification means, the wine must be made from 97 percent certified grapes, all of which were grown in an Oregon appellation. OCSW currently recognizes four agencies' certifications: Demeter Certified Biodynamic, Oregon Tilth Certified Organic, the LIVE (Low Input Viticulture & Enology) sustainable certification, and Food Alliance, which verifies sustainable practices among food producers and handlers. LIVE, which previously focused on vineyards, introduced a new sustainable winery certification in 2008—focusing on energy usage, water management, worker health and safety—to support the OCSW program. Seventeen wineries joined that pilot program, with the first getting certified this year.

"One of the things wineries are responding to is that they can use different agencies for different parts of process," said Farthing. For example, they can farm organically, but focus on sustainability for their winery.

As of 2011, OCSW will also require certification by Salmon Safe, a regional organization that focuses on protecting waterways to maintain healthy fish populations—a key issue in Oregon. (Salmon Safe is already included in LIVE certification.) "They have requirements that go above and beyond with respect to the watershed, which is so tightly linked to the vineyards," said Farthing. "We thought that was a critical extra layer."

The pilot-program wineries had been working on sustainable farming and production for some time, and many just needed to take a few extra steps for the OCSW program. But wineries that just join now can expect to take two to three years to earn the OCSW certification on their wines, said Farthing. "The biggest hurdle is the time and energy it takes to go through the certification," he said. "It takes a lot of resources to get here."

The release of the logo on wine labels is being accompanied by a broader educational campaign, including a consumer-oriented website (www.ocsw.org), social networking via Facebook and Twitter, and winery materials for sales presentation to distributors, retailers and sommeliers.

This marketing component is helpful to Oregon wineries because many certifying agencies don't have the resources to do much consumer outreach. "I'm not into [sustainability] because it's a good sales technique. We wanted to do it philosophically," said Ronni Lacroute, co-owner of WillaKenzie, which will release its 2008 Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc with OCSW logos this summer. "But why not share the message?"

Also important, according to Lacroute, OCSW explains the concept of sustainability in connection with the place. "It shows the commitment within the whole community of Oregon

winegrowers," she said. "We're all respecting the earth in various ways. Having a broad umbrella is going to permit us to all be in the same camp, instead of 'He's doing this and I'm doing that.'"