

# SPOTTSWOODE

## **Paradise Lost? Striking a Balance**

AN immense amount of growth and change has taken place in the wine industry recently, due in large part to the great success the wine business has been fortunate to enjoy. This success, and the resultant substantial increase in vineyard plantings, has drawn attention to our industry as never before. Where we have historically been perceived in a predominantly positive light, there is now awareness that vineyards and tourism have a significant impact on our environment and community. Legitimate concerns have been raised and it is our sense that, as an industry, we have an obligation to address them responsibly. This is not unique to Napa Valley, rather, it seems to be prevalent throughout California's major winegrowing areas, from Santa Barbara to Sonoma.

There are issues in various wine regions that illustrate the potential conflicts between concerned citizens and winegrowers. Temecula, in Southern California, has been ravaged by the Glassy Winged Sharpshooter, which is an aggressive spreader of Pierce's Disease.

In an effort to keep this insect from establishing itself in other areas, spraying regimens have been undertaken by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (as a side note, parasitic wasps have also been experimentally released in the hope that a natural solution can be found). There has been a backlash against this spraying in some counties, most notably in Sonoma County. A group there advances the idea that the threat this bug poses is a result of a purported vineyard "monoculture," and categorizes Pierce's Disease as a form of natural selection. True, there has been more land planted to vines, but the wine industry in Sonoma is a great contributor to the county's economic prosperity and beauty. Given that landowners will not keep their land fallow, aren't vines preferable to housing or other urban development? Yet, on the other hand, how much vineyard is "enough"? Is there a middle ground that can be found? Are there answers to these questions?

— More —

A Family Wine Estate



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In Santa Barbara County last year, there was a backlash against the sacrifice of beautiful, old oak trees for the purpose of planting vineyards. As a result, companies such as Kendall Jackson began incorporating these incredible trees into their vineyard plans, illustrating the ability of grape growers and those concerned for the environment to resolve contentious issues. In Santa Barbara today, there is talk of prohibiting the establishment of more wineries with public facilities. This represents an effort to maintain the rural character of the county, ostensibly by controlling the number of tourists who visit the area. The winegrowers maintain that a successful industry and tourism bring economic vitality to the region, while those in opposition don't want to see the area become “another Napa Valley,” a sentiment that dramatically reflects the change in perspective toward the wine industry that has taken place!

Napa County is impacted by all of the above and more. We are actively addressing many issues, among them a lack of adequate migrant farm-worker housing; the conversion of forested hillsides into vineyards; the health of the Napa River watershed; the restoration of wetlands; tourism and traffic (at what point does one risk killing the goose that laid the proverbial golden egg?); the Glassy Winged Sharpshooter; and a lawsuit brought by the Sierra Club against the county for inappropriately approving vineyard plans. In response to some of these issues, groups that have historically been at odds with one another are joining together to find solutions. These alliances bode well for our future.

In response to this growth and its impact on our environment we think it is critical that, as an industry, we work constructively with our neighbors and communities to find common ground. We feel we have achieved this on a personal scale—through our commitment to organic farming and our efforts to improve local watersheds—and it seems that others in the wine industry are coming to recognize their obligation to be more sensitive toward their neighbors. Our hope is that there is and will be a greater cognizance that, though we own the land and have the right to farm it (subject to appropriate permits, of course), we need to go a step further and recognize our obligation to be good stewards of our land. We must illustrate this sensitivity not only by planting our vineyards responsibly, but also by farming them in a manner that causes minimal environmental impact. We should also endeavor to tailor the commercial aspects of our wineries to our rural, agricultural surroundings. Striking a balance between the needs of farming, tourism and our greater communities is crucial if we are to maintain a viable community over time.