

A Nichols Worth of Wine
January 2008

**Green, Organic, Biodynamic, Sustainable.
Hype, Hope or Chutzpah?**

Is there a winery, vineyard or grape grower that hasn't yet professed to turning "green"? Increasingly they claim to have, though in practice, very little may have changed in their winemaking. Many feel that unless they quickly join the environmentally religious, they'll soon be turning red. On the bottom line that is.

Sorry for the skepticism, but decades after we first espoused to becoming more conscious of our planet, everyone in the food and wine business aspire to be known as producers and purveyors of pure and unadulterated products. Or, to quote them, become "green". Whatever that means.

Organic farming is empirically definable. There are strict regulatory guidelines for all things organic. Biodynamic farming, as best I can determine, is an abstract attempt by a few dozen American producers (Fetzer, Benzinger, and Bonny Doon to name three) to allow wines to "make themselves" with as little intervention as possible. Commendable, but hardly a new practice. In the "Old World", many European winemakers have and continue to make wines in this manner. They're called wines with "terroir". But "green"?

I spent a number of years living in Marin County, California, second only to Berkeley in terms of Birkenstocks, radish sprouts and recycling, where I developed a huge respect for the environment. But when the likes of the Publix grocery chain invests millions in revamping their business model to going "green", do I grow increasingly suspicious? Duh, well yeah!

Has anyone seen a certified definition of this "green" movement? Should we take it all at face value? Sorry, but I think this is as much a "Madison Avenue" movement than one huge ecological epiphany. Wine has become BIG business and merger mania continues. While I'm sure a number of the brands in these galactic portfolios claim to be "green", I suspect the affection for this color has substantially more to do with cash flow.

As much as I shudder at the thought of increased government meddling, perhaps they do need to step in and challenge businesses peddling their "green" wares. Or at least define and set some standards for this increasingly popular marketing moniker.

In all fairness, there are a number of truly organic and environmentally conscious grape growers and vineyards out there. Fetzer's Paul Dolan, has been a leader in this movement for decades. But I caution that we not get too caught up in the mass marketing of the wine (or food) "green" movement, lest we end up red faced with embarrassment to learn that the "environmentally" friendly wine we're sipping in fact reads more like the old "better living through chemistry" products of yesteryear.

Did you know...

China has more acres planted to wine grapes than the US.