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Buzzwords for Quality: *Sustainable, Organic, Biodynamic*

As more consumers begin to realize that the business of business it to make profits, not look after the health and welfare of customers, consumers are increasingly turning to businesses and products that offer various guarantees of quality and safety. More consumers are concerned about not only the quality of products that they directly consume, but also how the production of those products affects the general environment, the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the soils they tread. How businesses treat their employees is also on the consumer radar as Nike and Banana Republic among others know well. Especially in the area of food and beverage purchases, consumers are demanding that products be wholesome.

Amazingly, San Francisco Wine Institute, the winery trade association, reports that “according to the Roper-Starch Green Gauge report, 2002, 46 percent of the population was concerned about the environment and would purchase “green” products over others if it didn’t require much effort. Other research from the Natural Marketing Institute says that just over 70 percent of consumers indicate that knowing a company is mindful of its impact on the environment and society makes them more likely to buy its products or services, and 50 percent state it makes them more likely to buy their stock.” These are amazing statistics and are motivating business to clean up their practices, although this is only the beginning of what is a promising trend. We can only hope that G.E. and Monsanto are listening. Every day, we learn that medications we take, cosmetics that we use, foods that we consume, clothes that we wear and take to the cleaners among many other tools in our daily lives incorporate toxins that we would be wise to avoid. And the list goes on.

So what are the buzzwords that businesses and consumers are using to signal quality? In the food and wine business, there are primarily three, and they are used internationally in many languages: sustainable, organic, and biodynamic. What do they mean and how are they different?

Sustainable

Wine Institute has done much to define, promote, and even certify grape growers, who practice sus-

tainable farming methods, which Wine Institute describes as “environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically feasible... a comprehensive program encompassing hundreds of best management practices in the winery, vineyard, and with neighbors. Specific practices include activities such as recycling, conserving energy and water, reducing pesticide use, composting, and using cover crops to build soil health and habitat for beneficial insects. It means maintaining surrounding ecosystems to encourage biological diversity. Sustainability assures the well-being of employees and encourages more communication with neighbors. This definition can be applied to other crops as well.

Organic

California has nearly 8000 acres of wine grapes that are certified organic, although wine labels don’t necessarily indicate that either the wine or the fruit is organic. The difference is that organic fruit is grown without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides, “synthetic” being the keyword here. Third party inspections monitor farming practices. Organic wine is, of course, made from organic fruit but it does not contain added sulfites to prolong shelf life. It too undergoes laboratory inspection and certification that it contains less than 10 parts per million of sulfites. In other words, a wine can be made from organic fruit without being an organic wine if the winemaker adds sulfites.

Biodynamic

Biodynamic farming is the strictest of the three disciplines and the most sustainable, because no outside resources can be brought in from beyond the confines of the farm. Any soil enrichment, pest control materials, or general aids to plant health must be grown or prepared from materials on the site. As the Wine Institute describes it, “biodynamic agriculture is a holistic system where soil is nurtured through natural remedies, and planting, harvesting, and bottling take place according to the positions of the planets and lunar phases. Natural animal and vegetable matter is applied to soil to strengthen it, and various ho-

See **BUZZWORDS**, opposite side

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