

Research Brief

Sustainability Programs in the Central Coast Viticulture Region of California: Winegrape Grower Perceptions and Participation

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Fall 2012

Funded by the National Science Foundation

Introduction

California's Central Coast viticulture region is home to a number of regionally focused agricultural organizations that provide outreach programs centered on the concept of sustainability. The most prominent of these is the Central Coast Vineyard Team (CCVT). Since 1994 the CCVT has been sponsoring activities including field demonstrations and research, informational meetings and workshops, a sustainability self-assessment, a sustainability third-party certification system (Sustainability in Practice)¹, and industry fairs. Additionally, the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) has been providing outreach since 2002 and certification since 2010.

This research brief presents results from a mail survey of winegrape growers in the Central Coast American Viticulture Area. The survey collected data on whether growers are participating in various sustainability programs and certification systems and their perceptions about how successful these programs have been at achieving sustainability goals. We hope the findings reported here will be useful for identifying challenges and opportunities as California's viticulture and wine industry pushes forward with sustainability programs at the regional and state level.

Key Findings

Many Central Coast growers (62%) who participated in sustainability outreach activities reported that the program they were "most familiar" with was the CCVT, followed by the Independent Grape Growers of Paso Robles Area (12%). The general outreach activities growers participated in most frequently were reading newsletters and attending field meetings. Grower participation in outreach activities

specifically geared towards sustainability ranged broadly from completing the CCVT's sustainability self-assessment process (43%) to completing the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance's sustainability certification system (6%). We found higher participation in self-assessment compared to certification. Growers also participated more in activities offered by regional programs. A majority of growers think the CCVT has improved relationships between the viticulture and wine industry and environmental regulatory agencies (72%), improved wildlife habitat (68%), improved consumer perception of the region (68%), reduced environmental risks of agriculture (67%), improved biodiversity (66%), reduced health risks to local community (59%), and improved winegrape quality (55%). The objectives growers perceive the CCVT as being least successful at realizing include streamlining farm management operations, reducing labor costs, and reducing the inherent uncertainty of farming. Growers are generally supportive of the CCVT and the CSWA, but they show a clear preference for regional over the statewide sustainability programs.

Methodology

We conducted a mail survey² and follow-up telephone calls of 1489 winegrape growers in the Central Coast region. Growers were identified through 2010 Pesticide Use Reports from all counties within the Central Coast American Viticulture Area and through Internet searches of publicly available information. An advisory team of 25 growers and outreach professionals contributed to survey design and publicity. A total of 353 completed surveys were collected, for a response rate of 32% (adjusted to account for an observed 26% rate of ineligibility of non-respondents).

Detailed Results

¹ While we focus on the Sustainability in Practice certification system at a regional scale, the certification is open to growers statewide (As of 2012 ~10% of certified acres are outside of the Central Coast region).

² The survey is available on the Internet at http://environmentalpolicy.ucdavis.edu/files/cepb/CC_Final.pdf.

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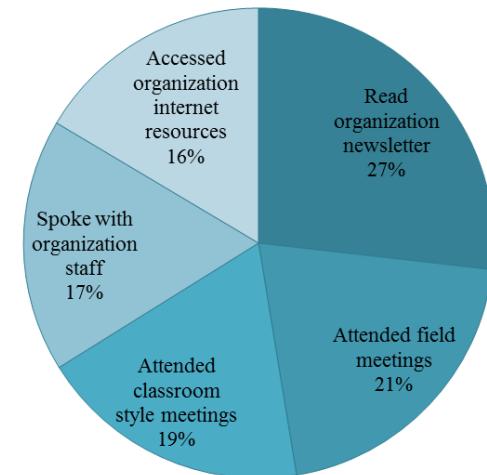
Table 1: Percentage of Central Coast growers participating in sustainability outreach activities who identified each organization as the one they were "most familiar" with	
Organization name (n=15)	%
Central Coast Vineyard Team	61.69
Independent Grape Growers Paso Robles Area	12.34
California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance	11.04
Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains	4.55
UC Cooperative Extension	3.90
Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance	3.25
Lodi Winegrape Commission	1.95
County Farm Bureau	1.30
Livermore Valley Winegrowers Association	1.30
Natural Resource Conservation District	1.30
Napa Green/Fish Friendly Farming	0.65
Ecological Farming Association	0.65
Deep Root Coalition	0.65
Paso Robles Vintner and Grower Association	0.65
Santa Clara Valley Winegrowers Association	0.65

Percentages do not sum to 100. Growers often listed more than one organization that they were "most familiar" with.

In an open-ended survey question, respondents were asked to provide the name of the organization providing sustainability outreach that they were most familiar with. **Table 1** reports the percentage of growers who cited each of 15 different organizations. Many organizations cited were producer organizations from across the different sub-regions within the Central Coast. The list also included conventional and alternative agricultural organizations as well as those from other regions. A majority of growers who responded to the question (62%) cited the Central Coast Vineyard Team as the organization they were most familiar with. The second most frequently listed was the Independent Grape Growers of Paso Robles Area (12%). This result suggests that while sustainability outreach in the Central Coast is being carried out by a network of organizations, the CCVT is a key actor at the center of this network.

Growers were asked to report whether they participated in five general types of outreach activities offered by seven different organizations. **Figure 1** reports the portion of total participation in outreach activities that occurred in each of the five different categories of activities. In other words, the figure reports the "market share" of each activity category. Out of the total participation in outreach activities, 27% involved reading newsletters, followed by attending informational field meetings (21%) and attending classroom-style meetings (19%). By contrast, only 17% of participation activities

Figure 1: Portion of total participation ("market share") in outreach activities that occurred in each activity category



involved speaking directly with staff and 16% accessing Internet resources.

Figure 2 reports levels of grower participation in five outreach activities specifically around the concept of sustainability. In general, we found more growers used sustainability self-assessment than went through the full certification process. We also found that more growers use the regional sustainability self-assessment and participate in regional certification system than the statewide counterparts. The growers who reported not participating in, or not even being aware of, these activities represent an untapped potential for expanding grower participation.

Figure 3 reports the percentage of growers who rated the CCVT's success at achieving 15 environmental, social, and economic goals on a 5-point scale of "very successful", "somewhat successful", "neutral", "somewhat unsuccessful", and "very unsuccessful". The goals were sorted in decreasing order by the sum of "very successful" and "somewhat successful" responses. We focused on the CCVT in this analysis, as opposed to other programs, because it was the program growers were most familiar with (see **Table 1**). In general, Central Coast growers perceive the CCVT to be more successful at helping growers realize environmental objectives than economic objectives. Growers report the CCVT as being most successful at improving the relationship between the viticulture and wine industry and environmental regulatory agencies. A majority of growers perceive the CCVT to be

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successful at achieving environmental goals including improving wildlife habitat, reducing environmental risks, and improving ecological biodiversity. A majority of growers reported the CCVT has been successful at realizing objectives with indirect economic benefits including improving consumer perception of the region and improving winegrape quality. In contrast, a minority of growers report success at realizing objectives with direct economic benefits to growers including reducing the quantity of record keeping, reducing labor costs, reducing the amount of time necessary for vineyard management, increasing vineyard yield, improving economic returns to growers, and reducing input costs. An average of 15% of growers reported that they “don’t know” if the CCVT has been successful at realizing the 15 goals.

Figure 4 reports the growers’ level of support for regional and statewide sustainability programs on a 5-point scale of “strongly oppose”, “somewhat oppose”, “neutral”, “somewhat support”, and “strongly support”, with a “don’t know” option. The figure was sorted by the sum of “somewhat support” and “strongly support” in decreasing order. Note, this figure only includes data from growers who listed the CCVT as the organization they were most familiar with³. In general, many more growers support than oppose all of the sustainability programs (regional and statewide).

We found more support for the regional than the statewide programs. This trend held for both the programs themselves and their certification systems. A large majority (82%) of growers were supportive of the CCVT, while fewer growers (46%) were supportive of the CSWA. Similarly, 64% of growers were supportive of the CCVT’s SIP certification system, while 20% were supportive of the CSWA’s certification system. Another notable pattern was that growers were more supportive of the programs than they were of the programs’ certifications system. On average, 32% of growers were supportive of the programs and 27% were supportive of the certification systems. Finally, the relatively large percentage of growers who reported being neutral or who were not sure of their support of sustainability programs suggests that there are opportunities for increasing grower awareness and involvement.

Our results also suggested that growers tended to support the program they were most familiar with. For example, while 82% of the 96 growers who cited the CCVT as the organization they were most familiar with were supportive of

the CCVT (see **Figure 4**), 83% of the 18 growers who cited the CSWA as the organization they were most familiar with were supporting of the CSWA (figure not shown).

Management Implications

Our results echo ongoing and unresolved tensions in California’s viticulture and wine industry between regional and the statewide sustainability programs. Compared to statewide programs, the regional program (CCVT) received higher levels of recognition, participation, and support. These differences are fundamentally rooted in the level to which growers are personally involved and invested in the programs. Regional programs and their leadership have a longer shared history and more opportunities to build relationships and trust with growers. Because regional programs include growers in the creation and design of their outreach activities and certification systems, there is great potential for grower buy-in. Further complicating the issue is the overlap between sustainability certification and regional branding efforts used by the industry for market differentiation. Our results highlight the need for regional and statewide sustainability programs to cooperate and provide synergistic outreach to growers, rather than compete for the attention of the same growers. We argue that regional and statewide programs and certification systems should be designed as *complements* as opposed to *substitutes* to one another.

Our results suggest that growers in the Central Coast participate in a network of programs that provide outreach around the concept of sustainability. Our results provide insight into how programs might refine their communication with growers and their outreach to growers. In terms of communication, growers are clearly receptive to in-person meetings and traditional newsletters. However, their use of Internet resources may increase with continued adoption of computer technologies in agriculture. While the CCVT is rated as being effective at realizing some important objectives related to environmental, social, and economic issues, it still faces the challenge of reducing the costs to growers of implementation. In terms of grower participation in outreach activities, growers participate less in the rigorous activities because of the demand on time and other resources at the management level. This avoidance of short-term costs may be in spite of any potential long-term economic, environmental, or social benefits of participation.

³ Due to the way our survey question was structured, we were not able to collect data about the level of support for the CCVT from all growers in the region. We were only able to collect data from growers who were most familiar with the CCVT (see **Table 1**).

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Figure 2: Percentage of Central Coast growers who reported participating in specific outreach activities

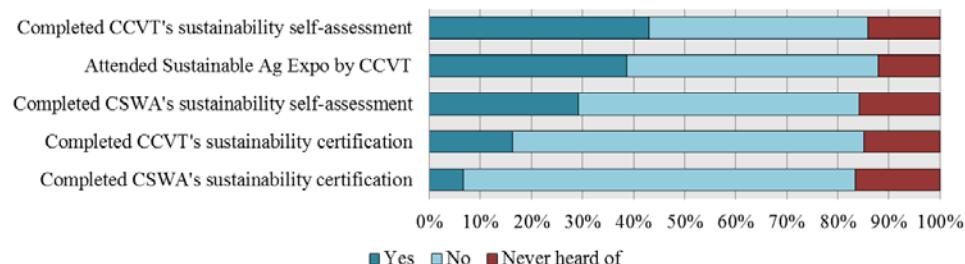


Figure 3: Central Coast growers' perceived successes of Central Coast Vineyard Team

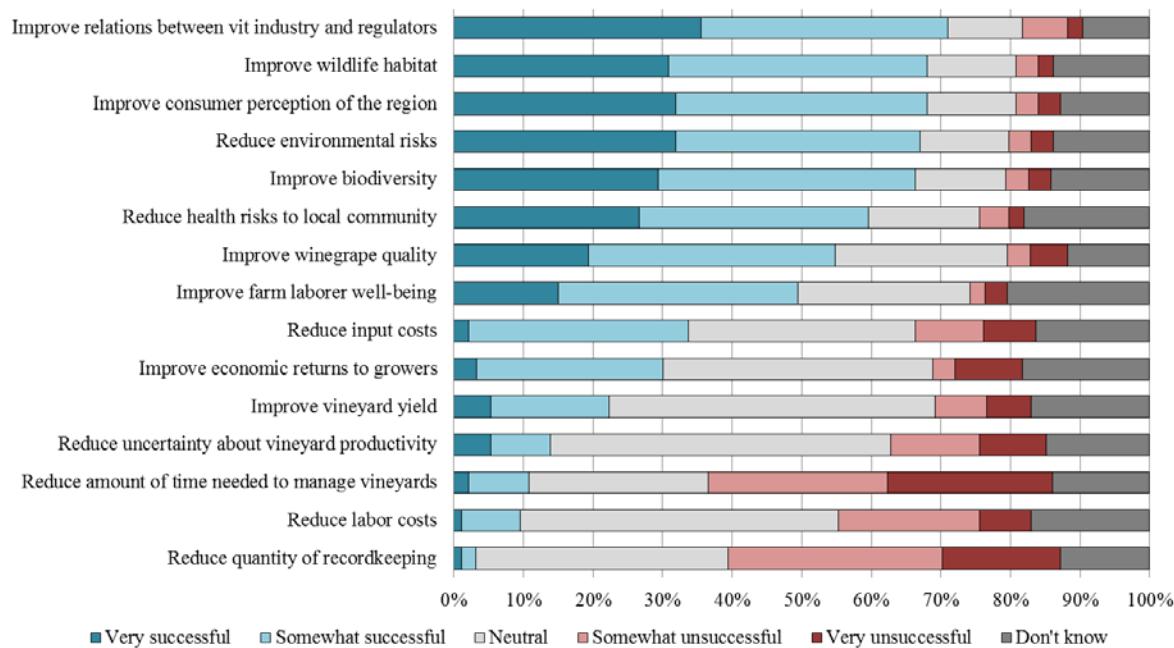
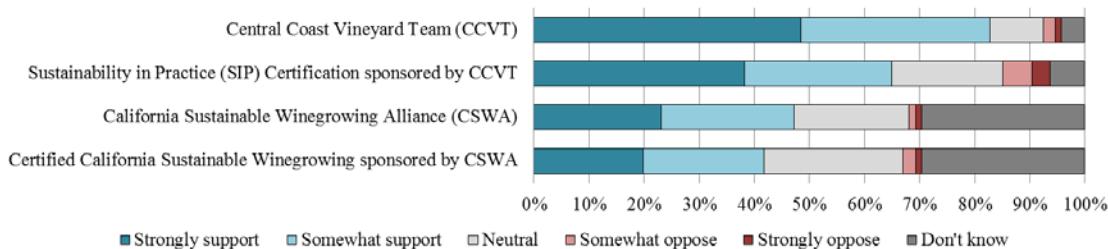


Figure 4: Support for sustainability organizations and certification systems by growers who cited the CCVT as organization they were most familiar with



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