

Sustainability Programs in the Napa Valley Viticulture Region of California: Winegrape Grower Perceptions and Participation

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Introduction

The Napa Valley's history of winemaking is paralleled by a history of agricultural organizations that provide grower outreach, some of which has been centered on the concept of sustainability. Two notable examples of such organizations include the Napa Valley Grapegrowers (NVG) and the Napa Green Certified Land (NG) certification system. Since 1975 the NVG has been sponsoring activities including field demonstrations and research, informational meetings and workshops, an Internet-based winegrape buying and selling database, and industry fairs. The NG certification system, established in 2000, requires growers to go through a process of assessment, planning, and practice adoption. 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 Napa Valley 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 the 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 outreach at the regional and state levels.

Key Findings

Many Napa Valley growers (62%) who participated in sustainability outreach activities reported that the program they were "most familiar" with was the NVG, followed by the Napa Sustainable Winegrowing Group (sponsored by Napa County RCD) and the NG certification system (20% and 18% respectively). The general outreach activities growers participated in most frequently were reading newsletters and attending classroom and field meetings sponsored by local programs. Grower participation in specific outreach

activities ranged broadly from attending the Napa Valley Viticulture Fair (73%) to completing the CSWA's sustainability certification system (11%). We found higher participation in industry events such as attending fairs and workshops compared to individual activities such as using self-assessment workbooks. Growers also participate more in activities offered by regional sustainability programs. A large majority of growers think the NVG has improved farm-labor well-being (79%), reduced environmental risks (79%), improved winegrape quality (76%), and improved wildlife habitat (76%). The objectives growers perceive the NVG as being least successful at realizing included streamlining farm management operations, reducing labor costs, and reducing the inherent uncertainty of farming. Growers are generally supportive of the NVG, NG, and the CSWA, but they show a clear preference for regional over the statewide sustainability programs.

Methodology

We conducted a mail survey¹ and follow-up telephone calls of 611 winegrape growers in the Napa Valley American Viticulture Area. Growers were identified through 2010 Pesticide Use Reports from the Napa County Agricultural Commissioner 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 237 completed surveys were collected, for a response rate of 42% (adjusted to account for an estimated 20% ineligibility of non-respondents).

Detailed Results

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

¹ The survey is available to view on the Internet at http://environmentalpolicy.ucdavis.edu/files/cepb/Napa_Final.pdf

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Table 1: Percentage of Napa Valley growers participating in sustainability outreach activities who identified each organization as the one they were "most familiar" with

Organization name (n=14)	%
Napa Valley Grape Growers	41.90
Napa County RCD/Napa Sustainable Winegrowing Group	20.00
Napa Green/Fish Friendly Farming	18.10
California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance	7.62
Other regional grower organizations	7.62
County Farm Bureau	5.71
Napa Valley Vintners	4.76
California Certified Organic Farmers	4.76
Ag Commissioner	3.81
UC Cooperative Extension	3.81
Napa Valley Vineyard Technical Group	2.86
Demeter	1.90
American Ag Credit	0.95
Natural Resource Conservation District	0.95

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

percentage of growers who cited each of 14 different organizations. A diversity of organizations was cited including governmental agencies operating at county, state, and federal scales, certification systems, producer groups, as well as conventional and alternative agricultural organizations. Out of all growers responding to the question, 42% cited the NVG as the program they were most familiar with. The second most frequently listed program was the Napa Sustainable Winegrowing Group (sponsored by Napa County RCD), which was listed by 20% of growers. The NG certification system was third, cited by 18% of growers. These results suggests that while the NVG is the most prominent organization providing sustainability activities the Napa Valley, growers rely on information from a broad network of organizations.

Growers were asked to report whether they participated in five general types of outreach activities offered by four 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, 25% involved reading newsletters, followed closely by attending classroom-style informational meetings (24%) and attending field meetings (20%). By contrast, only 16% 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 15% accessing Internet resources.

Figure 2 reports levels of grower participation in five specific outreach activities, some of which were geared explicitly around the concept of sustainability. In general, we found the highest participation in industry fairs, workshops, conferences, and expositions. Participation was lower in activities such as self-assessment workbooks and certification systems, which require greater grower commitment and allocation of resources such as time and money. In terms of sustainability certification systems, growers reported using the self-assessment workbooks more frequently than going through the full certification process. Growers also participated more in outreach activities hosted by regional programs than activities hosted by the statewide program. The growers who reported not participating in, or not even being aware of, self-assessment workbooks and certification systems represent an untapped potential for expanding grower participation.

Figure 3 reports the percentage of growers who rated the NVG'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 NVG in this analysis, as opposed to other programs, because it was the program growers were most familiar with (see **Table 1**). Growers report the NVG as being most successful at

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Figure 2: Percentage of Napa Valley growers who reported participating in specific outreach activities

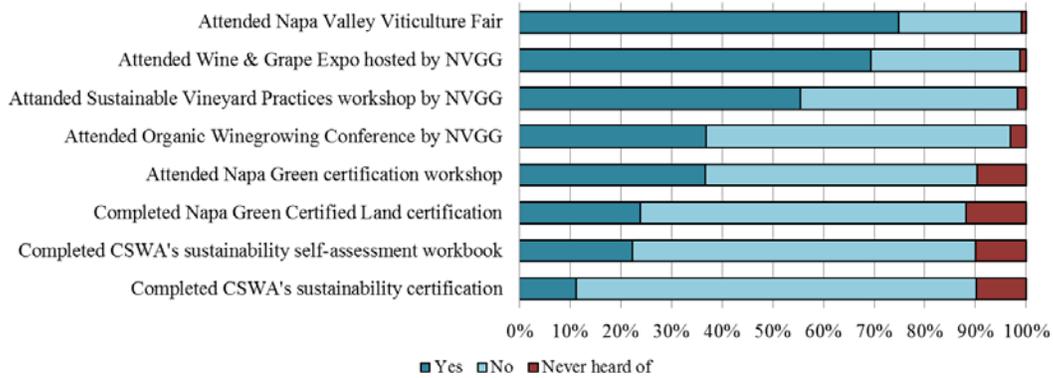


Figure 3: Napa Valley grower Perceptions of whether the NVGG has realized sustainability objectives

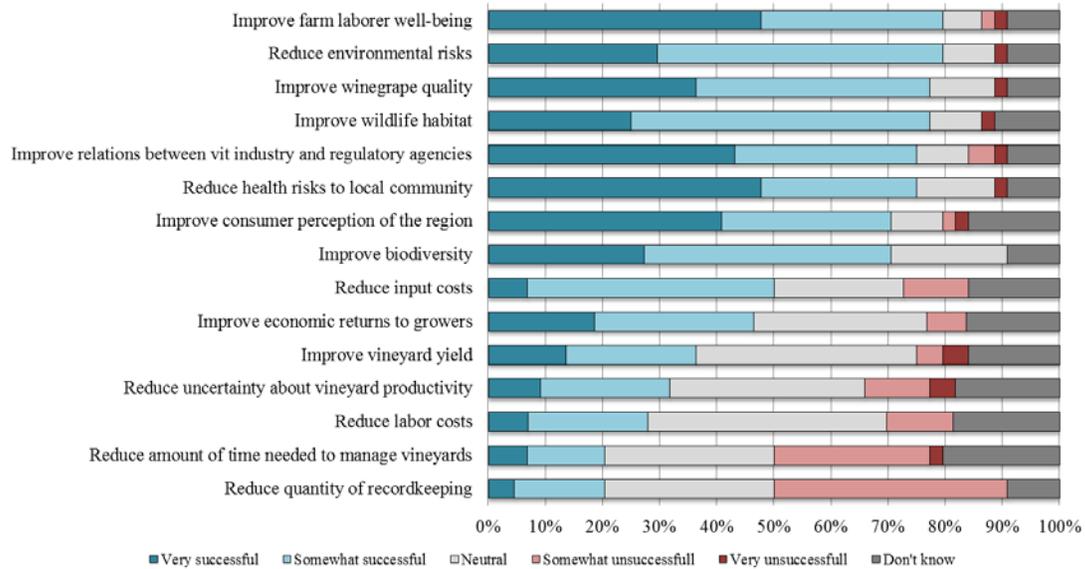
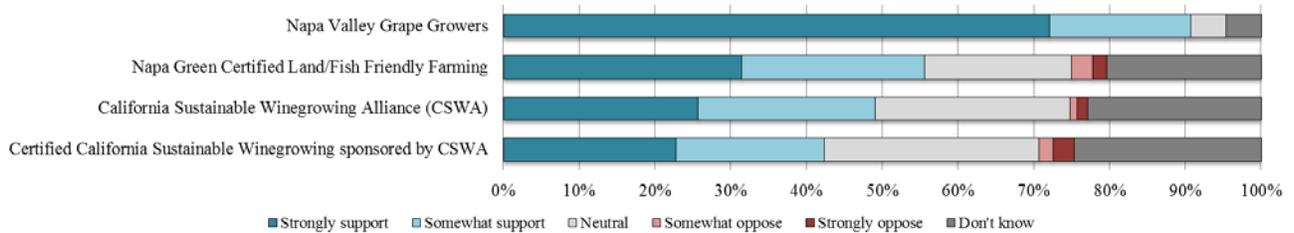


Figure 4: Support for sustainability organizations and certification systems by growers who cited the NVG as the organization they were most familiar with



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realizing collective benefits such as improving farm laborer well-being, reducing environmental risks, improving wildlife habitat, and reducing agricultural health risks to the community. A majority of growers perceive the NVG to be successful at providing some indirect economic benefits such as improving winegrape quality, improving relations between the industry and regulatory agencies, and improving consumer perception of the region. In contrast, a minority of growers reported the NVG at successfully helping growers realize individual economic benefits including reducing farm input costs, improving economic returns to growers, and reducing labor costs, and reducing time requirements and record-keeping. An average of 13% of growers reported that they “don’t know” if the NVG 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 results are sorted by the sum of “somewhat support” and “strongly support” in decreasing order, with those supported by the largest percentage of growers first. Note that the figure only includes data from growers who listed the NVG as the program they were most familiar with². 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 programs themselves and their certification systems. A large majority (91%) of growers were supportive of the NVG, while fewer growers (48%) were supportive of the CSWA. Similarly, a majority of growers (54%) were supportive of the NVG certification system while less than half (43%) 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’ certification systems. On average, 35% of growers were supportive of the programs and 24% 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 91% of the 44 growers who cited the NVG as the organization they were most familiar with were supportive of the NVG (see **Figure 4**), 100% of the 8 growers who cited the CSWA as the organization they were most familiar with were supportive 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 outreach programs. Compared to the statewide program, the regional program (NVG) 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 Napa Valley 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 NVG 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.

² Due to the way our survey question was structured, we were not able to collect data about the level of support for the NVG from all growers in the region. We were only able to collect data from growers who were most familiar with the NVG (see **Table 1**).