

## Organic Viticulture World-Wide

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### The Development of Organic Viticulture

In most wine growing countries organic viticulture is now becoming more and more important. In most non-European countries organic viticulture is still in an initial stage and the number of organic vineyards is still small.

The expansion of organic viticulture is hindered by the fact that in many countries incentives are provided for growers to adopt integrated pest management. Such incentive schemes are generally supported and promoted by the government, the chemical industry and conventional producer associations. As demand for conventional wines is booming, market forces do not provide much incentive for growers to convert to organic production methods. The limited knowledge about organic viticulture also poses a severe restriction of its expansion. Many conventional wine growers only have very little information about organic production techniques. However, there is also growing concern about decreasing soil fertility among some of the large corporate wine growers in Australia who are looking for more “sustainable” means of production.

The organic producer associations in many countries do not have sufficient expertise about organic viticulture yet. Therefore, various specific organisations for commercial organic wine growers were formed recently in countries such as New Zealand (Organic Wine Growers' Association), Australia (Organic Vignerons Association) and South Africa (Cape Organic Growers Association).

### Inspection and Certification

In Australia certifications are done by local organisations since it features on the third country list of EU-regulation 2092/91, allowing organic products into the European Union without further certification. On the contrary, in New Zealand inspections are carried out by European organisations on behalf of BioGrow, the New Zealand certifier. In some countries, especially the former Commonwealth countries, the establishment of local certifying organisations is supported by the Soil Association.

Problems, however, emerge in those countries, which are heavily dependent on export markets and which need EU-certification. In these cases the activities of European inspection bodies can hamper or sometimes even prevent the establishment of local inspection bodies and producer associations.

## **Plant protection**

Most of the organic grape growers are also winemakers and abide to the principle that the wine is made in their own winery. Various organic plant protection techniques are used, primarily to create a healthy environment for the vines and to reduce the cause of fungal infection and minimize disease pressure.

Like in Europe the extent of pest and disease problems in a vineyard depends largely on climatic conditions. In table grapes mainly powdery mildew (*Oidium*) causes problems. Control agents in organic grape production for this organism are sulphur or herb extracts. In warm and humid conditions botrytis (sour rot, bunch rot) can destroy the entire harvest.

The Mediterranean fruit fly can severely damage table grapes. Grapes exported to the United States and to Japan have to be absolutely free of such damage, incl. eggs or larvae. Growers tackle this problem with yellow traps and pyrethrum or chilli-garlic teas. Mealy bugs can also cause problems. The use of neem preparations in combination with pyrethrum has shown good results. Depending on the continent we are talking about, damage can also be caused by wild boars, rabbits, deer, baboons and kangaroos.

On the whole, in non-European countries the development of biological plant protection agents or the use of bacteria or fungi for this purpose is far more advanced than it is here. This is also the case from a legal point of view.

In most cases it is no problem for growers to promote predators through improved biodiversity as a preventative measure against pests. Vineyards are often large and can cover more than fifty hectares, which leaves enough space for hedges or corridors of remnant vegetation. The pesticide drift from neighbouring conventionally managed vineyards is far less of a problem than in Europe.

## **Varieties**

While grape varieties that are resistant against fungal infection are gaining importance in many European countries (Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Eastern Europe) they are not that common yet in other parts of the world, even though trial plots are established in New Zealand. Due to quarantine regulations in these countries it is difficult to introduce new varieties. There is no market for such grape varieties yet, partly because they are unknown. Decisions by organic wine growers outside Europe regarding the choice of variety are often strongly driven by international market demands. Therefore, the main varieties grown today are Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. In Canada and the northern United States, however, hybrids of old varieties are used. In Australia and in California mainly European varieties are grown. The Italian vinifera varieties are currently becoming increasingly important internationally.

Table grapes are far more difficult to grow organically than grapes for wine making. Therefore, new and more disease resistant varieties are sought after when vineyards are to be planted with table grapes.

## **Outlook**

The outlook for organic wine production on a global level is positive. The market for organic wines is growing and a considerable expansion of organic vineyards and particularly the area under vines in the new world can be observed. However, some challenges for the organic wine growers, mainly related to grape production, still remain to be met. Further problems are posed by the lack of training, advice and research. The

number of people with expertise in organic viticulture is still too small to meet the needs of the wine growers. The lack of local certification results in high costs for inspectors from overseas.

### **Viticulture Addresses outside Europe**

California Certified Organic Farmers CCOF, 1115 Mission Street, USA-Santa Cruz, phone +1-408-4232263, fax +1-408-4234528

NASAA, National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia, P.O. Box 768, AUS-Stirling-SA 5152 phone +61-8-83708455, Fax +61-8-83708281

Organic Vignerons Association of Australia, PO Box 503, Nuriootpa, SA 5355, Australia, Phone: +61-8-85622122, Fax: +61-8-85623034, Email:boss@dove.net.au

BIO-GRO New Zealand, P.O.Box 9693, Marion Square, Wellington , New Zealand, Phone: +64 4 801 9741, Fax: +64 4 801 9742, www.biogro.co.nz, Email: info@biogro.co.nz

### **IFOAM**

IFOAM represents the world-wide movement of organic agriculture and provide a platform for global exchange and cooperation.

Major aims and activities are:

- To exchange knowledge and expertise among its members and to inform the public about organic agriculture.
- To represent, internationally, the organic movement in parliamentary, administrative and policy making forums (IFOAM has for example consultative status with the UNO and FAO).
- To set and regularly revise the international "IFOAM Basic Standards of Organic Agriculture and Food Processing"
- To make an international guaranty of organic quality a reality. The International Organic Accreditation Services, Inc., (IOAS) runs the IFOAM Accreditation Programme to ensure equivalency of certification programmes world-wide.

IFOAM offers many platforms for information exchange,

- for example at the numerous international, continental and regional IFOAM conferences, or
- through our publications such as the magazine Ecology and Farming and conference proceedings
- Through the directory "Organic Agriculture World-wide", and also
- through its network of international contacts

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