



2003

SOKOL BLOSSER SUSTAINABILITY REPORT by: Susan Sokol Blosser

2003 was a year of asking questions and doing research, particularly on packaging and roofing. Our questions have sent our suppliers scrambling for answers and we don't have as much to show for our efforts as we would like. We hope to make strides that are more visible in the coming year. Here is a recap of the year, by area.

General

- 1) Visited the mother lode of sustainability: Russ and I visited Fetzer Winery and met with their Director of Corporate Sustainability, Patrick Healy. We saw their rammed earth administration building, their production facility, the Fetzer vineyards which are organic, and the Bonterra vineyards which are biodynamic. They have made a significant commitment towards zero waste and it is impressive.
- 2) Sustainability training: We continued our staff training, piggy-backing on Norm Thompson's program of teaching The Natural Step principles to new employees. At the end of 2003, the following staff members had attended one of the sessions: myself, Barbara, Lee, Ashleigh, Patti, Taylor. Alex, Doug and Mario have yet to attend. Russ has been through Natural Step training. Everyone who has attended has found it eye opening and valuable. Getting the training is the first step to integrating sustainable principles through staff involvement. We now need to build on this foundation and meet as a staff to discuss what more we can do at Sokol Blosser.
- 3) Barrel Cellar: Gov. Ted Kulongoski, Sec. of State Bill Bradbury, and U.S. Green Building Council President, Christine Ervin, came April 1, 2003 to dedicate our new barrel cellar, first winery in the world to attain LEED certification. It was a great and memorable day.
- 4) Mountain bike: Instead of the 6-wheeled 2-person "Gator" which I've been coveting for years, we bought the sustainable alternative for Russ to go through the vineyard to sample grapes. He loves it and put it to good use this past harvest.
- 5) Winery roof: We ending up patching the leaks and hoping we can hold out for a few years until cheaper sustainable options appear. We would like to cover the roof with solar panels and researched that option this year, but it would be very expensive—about 3 times what a standard PVC membrane roof would be.

Vineyard

- 1) Organic Certification: The big news is that in Sept. 03 we received organic certification from Oregon Tilth, the USDA certifier in Oregon. We currently have "T" (for transitional) status. If we continue to pass inspection we will automatically move into "O" (full organic) status in Sept. 2005. All acreage owned by the vineyard, winery, and Alex's homesite is under the certification, so this includes flower and vegetable gardens as well as vineyards. Getting this is a big deal as it took me close to a year to do the paperwork for the application. I don't know exactly how many certified organic vineyards there are in Oregon but there aren't many—maybe about 5 or 6. Wineries that have certified O vineyards include Amity, Brickhouse, Cooper Mt., and King Estate.
- 2) Black plastic: After a lot of discussion, we used black plastic under the vines in our new plantings in 2000. The plastic prevented weed growth around the vines, preserved moisture, making irrigation unnecessary, and overall produced visibly stronger plants. The problem now is what to do with the plastic after 3 or 4 years when the plants don't need it any more. We have learned that this plastic can be recycled into the new plastic decking that has become so popular, but it can't be used unless it is cleaned first. The lumber companies producing this decking are 1 to 3 years away from building a washing facility on the west coast. We are trying to hold on to the plastic until that happens. If we pull it up sooner, it goes to the land fill, which happened in 2003.
- 3) We entered an intense program in 2003 focused on building the humus content of the soil in the vineyard, recognizing soil development as the basis for a healthy vineyard ecology. The program involves compost on the vines, soil-building cover crops, straw mulch in the phylloxerated part of the old vineyard, and discontinuing rototilling and switching to machines which do not destroy the soil structure. We have realized that over the years we have depleted the soil and we are trying to rebuild it. This is an ongoing program and we hope to see positive results this year. We did base soil tests in several parts of the vineyard for both microbial activity and nutritional elements. We'll do the same tests next fall and see if we can quantify our progress.
- 4) Compost: We built our own compost piles two times (June and October) in 2003, both times with organic straw and organic cow and horse manure. In October we also used pomace. The aged compost will continue to be used on the oldest vines.
- 5) Company vegetable garden: In 2002, we fenced an area near the equipment shed to use as an employee garden. Luis's crew planted and cared for it and the produce was available to all employees. It was a great success. In 2003, the first seeds planted didn't grow and the garden was behind all summer. We'll try again in 2004. The garden is farmed organically.
- 6) Prescott Western Bluebird Recovery program: In 2003, we got 2 more bluebird houses (total of 10) and had both a monitor and bander assigned to us. Since my monitoring had been haphazard, this insured regular monitoring. The down side was that I could never get hold of the monitor to give me a report. We do know that over the years, we have developed a nice little flock of bluebirds at our vineyard.

7) Plant Biodiversity: In an effort to increase species biodiversity, we planted every 15th row of vineyard to low growing wildflowers which we will let flower and go to seed in spring/summer of 2004. These will function as our "insectiary" rows, attracting beneficial insects. The lavender, Echinacea, rudbeckia, Russian sage, and yarrow planted around the winery also perform this function.

Winery Production:

1) Label paper for Evolution: We initiated discussion about using kenaf (treeless paper) for our labels. We heard about it from Fetzer Winery which uses it for their Bonterra label. Tapp, which prints our labels, had never heard of kenaf. Nor had Sally Morrow, our designer. Russ talked to Vision Paper, the company in New Mexico which makes kenaf and Avery Denison, the paper company in California which adheres paper to backing which makes it usable for pressure-sensitive labeling. The contact at Avery Denison wasn't familiar with kenaf but said she would research it. At the end of about six months, both Tapp and Avery Denison had procured paper samples and done wet strength testing on kenaf paper (wine labels need to stand up to refrigeration and ice buckets) and reported contradictory results-Tapp saying the paper failed the tests, Avery Denison saying the paper passed.

We had intended that all the Evolution 8th Edition labels would be printed in January 2004 on kenaf. Two things prevented this: first, the confusion over the durability of the paper. We saw the reports of the Tapp tests and tend to believe them. Second, the unavailability of the kenaf paper we need. Apparently kenaf has become so popular (a good sign) that Vision Paper can't make it fast enough. It is very disappointing, after all the hassles of getting everyone on board with this paper, to have it fall through at the last minute. We will continue to work on this for the next printing.

2) Labels for Sokol Blosser brand: We will move away from the foil paper for our PN, starting with the bottling this spring of the 2002 vintage. We are going back to the original design on white paper. All of the wines will have the same label look with a tab that will be a different color for each bottling.

3) Shrink wrap from glass pallets: The empty glass arrives for bottling in shrink wrapped pallets, generating huge amounts of shrink wrap over the course of the bottling. Large wineries, like Fetzer, have a huge compactor which compacts and bales the wrap, then sells it. We are too small to do this and even if all the Yamhill County wineries got together we would still be too small. Yet we do generate dumpster loads of shrink wrap and it is not locally recyclable like the cardboard is. However, thanks to a tip from Nik Blosser, we discovered Agri-Plas in Salem whose specialty is recycling agricultural and manufacturing plastics. So this year, starting in Jan. 2004, we will be recycling all the shrink wrap from bottling.

4) Pressure-sensitive label backing: Pressure sensitive labels come with a backing of fused plastic and kraft paper which is not recyclable because of the combination. We have learned it is possible to get our labels backed only with clear plastic, which would then be recyclable thru Agri-Plas. Because of the significant cost of having the dies made, we have decided not to do that this year.

5) Kraft wine cases: we are using kraft cases whenever we can. For the 2004 bottling, everything will be in kraft cases, except the new rose.

6) Pomace: All pomace generated at harvest is composted and returned to the vineyard.

Tasting Room:

1) Retail goods: 2003 saw us move towards selling organic/sustainable products in the TR. We started with Dagoba organic chocolate, and debuted our organic proprietary "Noir Bar", all of which have sold well. Lee researched organic cotton clothing. We ordered some from Patagonia in fall of 2003 and will be ordering T shirts from Indigenous Clothing in spring 2004. We would like to find an organic alternative for our Cuisine Perel line, but won't change unless we find an alternative that is equally good.

2) Packaging: Our gift boxes are kraft, as are our wine bags. We are still using styro shippers because we have had freeze damage using the cardboard. Lee has the styro supplier looking into vegetable-based styro shippers.