



## Sokol Blosser Winery | 2006 Sustainability Report

*By Susan Sokol Blosser, President*

I have been writing annual reports since 2003, chronicling the successes and failures Sokol Blosser has experienced in our drive towards sustainability across the operation. These reports sum up, for our employees, our customers, and our Board of Directors, our intentions and the challenges we have faced in fulfilling them. Each report deals only with that particular year. Looking back, it's nice to see how far we have come, so before beginning this year's report, I want to quickly summarize some of our successes. I hasten to add we have also had many setbacks, which are detailed in the sustainability reports on our website, [www.sokolblosser.com](http://www.sokolblosser.com), but here is a list of our successes prior to 2006:

- \* Organic certification for our vineyard
- \* U.S. Green Building Council LEED certified barrel cellar, first winery in world to achieve this
- \* Renewable wind power (4083 KWh per month)
- \* Winery waste from harvest (grape skins and stems) recycled into compost piles, which is then used to improve vineyard soil
- \* Large organic employee vegetable garden, managed by the vineyard crew
- \* Expanded work with the Prescott Western Bluebird Recovery Project and now have 15 birdhouses
- \* Remodeled our offices with recycled and recyclable furniture
- \* Brochures and copy paper now 100% post consumer waste recycled content
- \* Label backing from pressure sensitive labels and shrink wrap from wine case pallets recycled
- \* Eliminated foil capsules, printed wine labels on recycled paper, and put finished wine into kraft cases
- \* Sustainable products for tasting room sales, such as proprietary organic chocolate bars, Noir Bar and the M Bar, made for us by Dagoba
- \* Active in the Oregon Natural Step Network (Susan is on the board)

### THE NATURAL STEP

The Natural Step (TNS) to sustainability continues to provide the framework for Sokol Blosser's approach to sustainability. Being mindful of the four system conditions of TNS helps us think through how our actions affect the planet. The system conditions derive from basic science—the fundamental principles that govern the earth's systems.

I want to start the sustainability report for 2006 with a review of these conditions. In their scientific wording, I find them difficult to understand. Here is each system condition in its original form, followed by my explanation of what this means to us.

**\* Substances from the earth's crust must not systematically accumulate in nature.**

In plain language this means don't take stuff like fossil fuels out of the ground that cannot be reincorporated into the ecosystem. By mining, drilling, and extracting natural resources that have become necessary to keep our economy growing, we are doing two harmful things. First we are consuming, in a very short time, limited resources, which took millennia to form. Secondly, we are changing the natural conditions of our planet. Examples of the latter would be how increasing concentrations of carbon in the air from burning fossil fuels has led to not only to polluted air and water but to global climate change. Another example would be how a natural substance, such as mercury, once extracted from the ground to be used in various products, gets in the food chain through seafood and soil contamination and causes toxicity to living things.

**\* Substances produced by humans must not systematically accumulate in nature.**

This means don't put more manmade stuff into the ecosystem than the ecosystem can naturally break down. When we convert natural resources, such as petroleum or metals into refined or synthetic materials, we create two severe problems. First, in changing the molecular structure of synthetic materials such as plastic we have created materials that don't decompose. Synthetics stay in the biosphere for decades and travel by air and water to all parts of the globe. PCBs used in the 1940's and 50's are still causing human and animal deformities. Many plastics are not even recyclable and end up in landfills. The plastics that have been useful in so many ways have a downside: their extensive use has both created waste that has nowhere to go and caused health problems. Secondly, the materials we manufacture that do decompose, do so at a much slower rate than nature can absorb, with the result that we have overloaded the earth with our waste materials.

**\* The physical basis for the productivity and diversity of nature must not be diminished.**

This means we need to protect the natural environment, which through processes like photosynthesis breaks down the bad stuff humans put into the ecosystem. We have disrupted the balance of nature through overuse and over harvest. All in the name of economic growth, we have over fished our oceans, destroyed fish and wildlife habitat by stripping riparian areas, filling in wetlands for housing, and cutting down forests for timber and farming. We have killed the life in our soils through agricultural chemicals. Singly, these acts greatly affected local ecosystems. Together the repercussions have been global.

**\* People are not subject to conditions that systemically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.**

Our economic growth has been built on exploitation of some members of society by others. This has led to strife, wars, and unhappiness. Let us seek social justice for all and consider whether our practices are fair to all stakeholders: landowners, producers, suppliers, customers, workers, owners, community. Just like access to good public schools is considered a basic right in American, fresh, local, sustainable meat, vegetables, and fruit should be available to all segments of the population, not just the wealthy.

[NOTE: The Natural Step (TNS) began in Sweden in 1989 and has been adopted by business and civic entities in Europe, Canada, and the U.S. Oregon has a very active TNS network. For more info, see [www.ortns.org](http://www.ortns.org).]

## SUSTAINABILITY AT SOKOL BLOSSER WINERY IN 2006

Reversing the damage we have inflicted on our planet will take a global effort, by all nations and all peoples. I am not under any illusion that what we do at Sokol Blosser will have much effect. But while I am not optimistic, I have hope that if each of us does our part, our many small acts will add up to make a difference.

But even taking small acts is not easy, and this year, as in the past, we look back on a series of frustrations, setbacks, and a few victories. The following report is divided into continuing issues, frustrations and setbacks, and successes. This report focuses on one year, 2006. For previous year's reports, 2003-2005, see our website, [www.sokolblosser.com](http://www.sokolblosser.com).

### CONTINUING ISSUES

**CORK:** Many wineries have stopped using cork, the traditional wine bottle closure, and gone to either plastic corks or screw caps. Plastic has no appeal for us because it is not recyclable at the consumer level and we don't like plastic anyway as a petroleum-based product; it violates TNS system conditions 1 and 2. Research on screw caps indicates that they do a good job of keeping the wine sound. But screw caps are metal (a mined, non-renewable material) and have a plastic liner.

We have defended the use of cork closures as the most sustainable option based on cork's being a renewable resource as well providing wildlife habitat in the cork forests. But how sustainable is it when we have to ship twice as much wine for samples because some of the bottles may be affected with cork taint?

Should we be looking at screw caps or hold fast to cork? No one has done a life cycle analysis of cork or screw caps to measure their sustainability. We thought the cork companies might want to take this on. Winemaker Russ has started to make inquiries of some of the large cork companies, hoping to interest one in doing a sustainability analysis of cork versus screw cap closures, looking at everything from sourcing, production methods, transportation, packaging, etc. The cork companies indicate interest but so far none are willing to spend the money a life cycle analysis would entail.

### FRUSTRATIONS AND SETBACKS

**LABEL SETBACK:** We thought we had finally put our labels on a sustainable footing but our label printer couldn't get us recycled paper on a recyclable liner in time for our bottling in the spring. The problem seems to be too little demand for this environmental paper, so a long lead-time is needed and the printer didn't order the paper in time. They apologized profusely and we ended up with 30% post-consumer recycled content paper on a non-recyclable liner for over half of our labels.

**ICEWINE PACKAGING:** We decided to make our ice wine package more sustainable and less prone to quality control issues, by eliminating the acid etching. This was a big decision because our acid-etched bottle was so beautiful and had been so popular. Sandstrom Design designed a new paper label for us that could be flexo printed so we could use soy-based inks. When Alison Sokol Blosser went to do the

press check, they discovered the only paper that worked with the label design was metallic paper—the recycled paper produced fuzzy printing and see-through designs. The metallic paper had recyclable plastic backing and soy-based ink, but we were disappointed at having to give up the more environmentally sound paper. This was a case of taking two steps forward and one step back.

**STEAM GENERATOR:** Winemaker Russ had the great idea of using a steam generator, normally used to sterilize bottling lines, to clean tartrates from the stainless steel tanks. Using steam uses a fraction of the water in a hot water system and would eliminate the last synthetic chemical used in the winery, a caustic cleaner for removing the tartrate residue affixed to the tanks. We purchased one but found it didn't clean the way Russ had envisioned. At the end of the year, the manufacturer came to the winery to try to make it work better. They were able to improve its performance, but when we realized that the steam generator took 3 hours to clean a tank and the caustic cleaner took 30 minutes, we knew this was another great idea that didn't work.

**VINEYARD STAKES:** As we rip out our old vineyards to do replanting, we can recycle the trellis wire and reuse the posts. New treated wood is not allowed under organic standards, although we are allowed to use what we already have.

The problem was what to do with broken stakes or posts that can't be reused. They can't go to the burn pile or they would release noxious fumes from the pressure treating. We checked out all the recycling possibilities and no one would take treated wood.

We started using treated posts in the 1970's as the best way to trellis our vineyards. The most prevalent treatment for preserving the wood was called CCA, short for chromated copper arsenate. The EPA disallowed use of CCA after Jan 1, 2004, forcing wood treatment plants to convert to a preservative that did not generate hazardous waste in its production. But for almost 30 years, using CCA posts was considered a "best practice" among vineyardists. We know better now, but disposing of broken stakes is a problem. With a heavy heart, we ended up having to take it to the landfill and paying to dispose of all the broken stakes and posts.

## SUCCESSSES

**BIODIESEL INCREASE:** We started using biodiesel in our vineyard tractors 2 years ago at a 20% level. This year we increased the percentage to 50%.

**SOLAR PANELS:** We have wanted solar panels for electricity generation for years but they have always cost more than we felt able to spend. Finally, this year, with the threat of the good tax incentives expiring, we decided to just do it. It took some time to figure out the best place to put 150 feet of giant solar panels so they would have maximum sun yet not be in the way of vineyard equipment or visitors' view of the valley. We had always thought the winery roof would be ideal but it turned out our big trees provide too much shade for the roof to work. We finally installed a 25 kW system below what used to be our concert amphitheater, at the top end of a vineyard block. We hope to generate enough energy to cover one third of our needs.

**PLASTIC RECYCLING IN OFFICES:** We've done a good job in the tasting room and in our offices of recycling office paper and plastic water bottles, but not with soft plastic, such as plastic grocery bags or plastic magazine covers. Now, thanks to our Scott Nagle, we have labeled containers to make it easy.

The soft plastic and plastic bottles get picked up with the winery shrink-wrap and label backing by our friends at Agri-Plas, whose business has grown exponentially.

#### **CONSUMER EDUCATION:**

**Salmon Nation:** We supported the Salmon Nation celebration at the Ecotrust Building in Portland in September and our Tasting Room Manager, Melissa, took compostable plastic wine cups for the wine tasting. Both these and compostable plastic silverware are starting to be more available and affordable.

**Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch:** We continue to support this great program, both by participating in their Cooking for Solutions fundraiser every May and by sending out their Seafood Watch folders to our Cellar Club members.

**AT HOME IN THE VINEYARD:** My book, *At Home in the Vineyard: Cultivating a Winery, an Industry, and a Life*, was published in August by the University of California Press. The press did not regularly use post consumer waste recycled paper but as part of my contract with them, I stipulated the book had to be published on the right paper. My book was printed on New Leaf EcoBook 50, a 100% recycled fiber of which 50% is de-inked postconsumer waste, processed chlorine free.

**NEW COMPANY CAR:** We decided we needed a vehicle for Lee, our regional sales person. He needed not only to be able to carry multiple cases of wine, but for health reasons it was important for him not to have to bend over to lift them out of a trunk. That meant a van or SUV, both unsustainable gas-guzzlers. We settled on the Ford's new hybrid Escape as the most fuel efficient of available choices.

**NEW HOME:** Russ and I built a new home in 2006 at the foot of the vineyard, on an old mobile home site. We worked with Neil Kelly Company to make our new home a "not so big house" and as sustainable as possible—all FSC wood, 90% recycled standing seam metal roof, icynene insulation, stained concrete floors, salvaged old growth Doug fir beams, solar panels, and more.

#### **ISSUES FOR 2007**

Looking ahead I see the following:

**CONTINUING EDUCATION:** Staff education is a top priority. Our two vice presidents, Alex and Alison will go through Natural Step training, a daylong immersion class. Derek Smith, former Director of Sustainability at Norm Thompson Outfitters, has agreed to trade sustainability training of the whole Sokol Blosser staff, in exchange for wine—a good deal for both of us.

**ORGANIC LABELING:** Our vineyards have been certified organic since 2005. We are deciding how we want to deal with organic labeling and expect to see the results of these decisions in 2007.

**SUSTAINABLE OUTDOOR LIGHTING:** Lighting after dark for customers and employees has become a serious issue. We don't have enough and what we have is not energy efficient. We will resolve this in 2007.

**NEW OFFICES:** We are expanding our office space and looking at how we can do it as sustainably as possible.

**SUPPLIERS:** We continue to look for like-minded companies with which to do business.