

It's no accident that people around the country view Oregon wines as environmentally friendly.

This is due in large part to the growth of the LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) program, which stresses a sustainable, holistic approach to growing and making wines.

"The more we can get people involved, the more we can spread the green message," said Matt Compton, a vineyard manager and winery co-owner who heads up the LIVE program technical committee.

The LIVE program was launched in 1997 under the leadership of vineyardist and educator Al MacDonald of Salem and Oregon State University viticulture professor Carmo Vasconcelos.

In 1999, prestige was added to the Oregon chapter when it became the first holistic, sustainable grape-growing program in the country endorsed and certified by the International Organization for the Biological and Integrated Control of Noxious Animals and Plants (IOBC), which is based in Denmark.

It's believed Oregon remains the only U.S. certified member state.

Compton, who co-owns Small World Wine Co., said that because Oregon undergoes very dry summers, a condition not found in Europe, the state was allowed to deviate from IOBC standards somewhat.

"We're real similar in climate to Burgundy, with the exception of summer rains," he said.

For that reason, LIVE growers need to find an alternative to beneficial insects normally attracted to grass isles and other vegetation in vineyards since these plants are removed to eliminate competition for water.

To compensate, IOBC requires that at least 5 percent of the vineyard be devoted to vegetation that will attract crop-friendly insects and that cultivation be restricted so that biodiversity can be maintained, Compton said.



MARK ROZIN/Capital Press

Al MacDonald, with Vineyard Management and Vineyard Operations program at the Chemeketa Community College, checks the grape vines planted at the Northwest Viticulture Center in West Salem, Ore. MacDonald helped to launch the LIVE program back in 1997.

LIVE alternative attracts growers

Compton said the LIVE program operates pretty much on a sustainable level, between certified organic and conventional farming, which relies on older farming methods such as soil building.

The LIVE spray program encourages a rotation of chemistries with different modes of action to thwart resistance.

LIVE growers also use eco-friendly alternatives to sulfur for powdery mildew control to prevent destruction of beneficial insects and the buildup of acidity in the soil.

Around 5,000 acres are in the Oregon LIVE program, 2,000 of those in grapes, said LIVE president Sterling Fox, owner of Oregon Grape Management.

Because LIVE certification takes the whole farm into account, certified acreage will always exceed acres actually planted to grapes, Fox said.

He added that if a portion of the farm is leased out to another grower, that ground will not be included in the certification. "Whatever the vineyard manager and/or owner is farming themselves is certified."

While not many LIVE growers are earning a premium for their grapes, growers in the program do enjoy a marketing advantage in many cases, Compton said.

Benton-Lane Winery, whose vineyards are managed by Compton, is a good example. "(We're) able to market our wines in key

areas of the country where these issues are important to people. It definitely opens doors in a highly competitive wine market."

"International certification through the IOBC in Europe is seen as a benefit to some consumers and many individual growers," Fox said. "As more wineries sell their wines abroad, the IOBC certification status is seen as a plus."

Certification in the LIVE program requires that growers score a certain amount of points on a score sheet. The program is flexible in that a grower who decides to, say, practice more cultivation than desired and lose some points can make up those points in another area, such as encouraging more biodiversity in another area.

"This gives them the flexibility as a grower to manage their farm in the manner they see fit rather than having the whole thing follow one recipe," he said.

LIVE certifies its own members. In addition to accumulating the necessary points, members must submit soil sample records every seven years, petiole samples every three years and sprayer calibration records every year. Sprayers must also be inspected every four years.

Currently, the LIVE program is mostly vineyard-oriented, with wineries having only to restrict the amount of sulfur used in winemaking.

The membership fee is \$100, with an additional \$250 annual inspection fee.