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**AWRI**

# Understanding Australian sustainability credentials

Sustainability is an area of increasing focus in the Australian wine industry, driven by consumer and market demand and the inherent desire of our producers to protect their land and livelihoods for future generations. In this column, Dr Mardi Longbottom answers some of the key questions about sustainability credentials and metrics that allow Australian producers to demonstrate their performance on a global stage.

## What is sustainability?

The concept of sustainability means meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations. It generally takes into account economics, the environment and communities. In the context of the wine industry, sustainability means growing grapes and making wine in ways that are not detrimental to the environment and in fact improve it so that we can continue growing grapes and making wine for infinite generations. The 'environment' needs to be considered in its broadest sense to include the communities and economies in which we operate.

Sustainability is complex and subjective. The elements of sustainability are intertwined and not the same for every grape and wine business. However, the use of standardised metrics does make it easier to measure and monitor our performance across a range of aspects that are critical to sustainability. For example, the most basic metrics such as yield, water, fertiliser and energy inputs, are all critical to understanding vineyard sustainability.

Since the early 1990s 'sustainability' has been described in range of ways in an attempt to succinctly communicate its scope. Simple descriptors such as 'the three Ps' (People, Planet, Profit), 'the

three Es' (environment, economy, equity) and 'triple bottom line' (environment, social, economic) are well accepted. More recently, in 2015, the United Nations defined 17 sustainable development goals (UN SDGs) which serve as a plan for everyone to achieve sustainability.

## Lately I've been hearing the acronym ESG a lot – what does it mean?

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) was coined in 2005 and has recently increased in prominence. ESG describes the metrics used by companies to evaluate and communicate their sustainability performance to

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markets, investors, shareholders and the community. The major difference with ESG is the focus on governance – the processes used by businesses to make decisions to ensure they operate efficiently, comply with the law and meet the needs of external stakeholders.

Australia is in a fortunate position with the recent focus on the social and governance elements of sustainability because, compared to some competitor countries, Australia is supported by a strong regulatory framework at local, state and federal levels. Examples of these include Work Health and Safety and Modern Slavery legislation and the general expectation that all Australians follow these laws.

### How can Australian growers and winemakers evaluate and communicate their sustainability credentials?

Over many years, the Australian wine industry has invested in Sustainable Winegrowing Australia (and its predecessors) and the program is supported by the key national wine industry bodies, the AWRI, Australian Grape & Wine and Wine Australia. The program provides an online platform for growers and winemakers to annually report their key sustainability metrics and to undertake a self-assessment of their practices. What sets it apart from other ESG platforms is the ability for members to benchmark their performance against others in the wine industry. For those who choose to become certified, the program is underpinned by a private certification standard (Freshcare Australian Wine Industry Standard of Sustainable Practice – Vit/Win). Once certified, members can use the Sustainable Winegrowing Australia trust mark to communicate their sustainability credentials. More information about Sustainable Winegrowing Australia can be found at

[www.sustainablewinegrowing.com.au](http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.com.au)

### Is Sustainable Winegrowing Australia certification internationally recognised?

The Sustainable Winegrowing Australia trust mark is trademark protected in Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, United States of America and Singapore. Trademark protection has been an important step ahead of recognition and use in the international marketplace, along with acceptance by key markets. Sustainable Winegrowing Australia and its certification standards have been independently benchmarked against thirty-eight similar international programs across twenty-seven Environmental, Social and Governance criteria. Based on the results of this benchmarking, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia certification is recognised by Systembolaget in Sweden and Alko in Finland. It is also a criterion for wines to be selected by the Swedish and Norwegian wine monopoly retailers. The Sustainable Winegrowing Australia trust mark is also an approved certification mark which, if visibly displayed on wine packaging, qualifies the wine for entry into Sweden's 'Sustainable Choice' product category.

Sustainable Winegrowing Australia has also been benchmarked against other agricultural commodity groups in Australia using the Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework (AASF). The AASF has been created to communicate the sustainability status and goals of the Australian agricultural sector both in Australia and globally. The AASF is aligned with other global sustainability schemes and standards including Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture Systems, SAI Platform, World Benchmarking Alliance and Global Reporting Initiative.

### What are the benefits of having a strong sustainability strategy and credentials?

Certified members of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia regularly review their businesses and document a Sustainability Action Plan (SAP). Members tell us that the benefits of certification include:

- Active contribution to environmental protection and enhancement (e.g. reduced emissions and impact on air quality)
- Identification of production efficiencies and cost reductions
- Ability to access reduced-cost finance (e.g., sustainability-linked loans)
- Enhanced reputation in the community and marketplace
- Better engagement in the workplace
- Reduced risk (e.g., by implementing biosecurity systems)
- Increased accountability of the business
- Increased likelihood of making data-driven decisions
- Access to new markets
- Increased competitiveness in the marketplace

*For further information about sustainability credentials or Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, contact the AWRI helpdesk on (08) 8313 6600 or [helpdesk@awri.com.au](mailto:helpdesk@awri.com.au).*

### Further reading

Systembolaget approved certifications - [www.omsystembolaget.se/english/sustainability/labels/sustainable-choice](http://www.omsystembolaget.se/english/sustainability/labels/sustainable-choice)

[www.omsystembolaget.se/english/sustainability/labels/sustainable-choice/environmental-certifications](http://www.omsystembolaget.se/english/sustainability/labels/sustainable-choice/environmental-certifications)

