



Passion goes Green

The ever-growing awareness and interest in preserving our environment has been felt the world over, particularly recently. This movement toward “green” practices and organics has been steadily increasing in all realms of agriculture, and in the wine industry as well. It’s been a long time coming.

A number of Vias producers are currently practicing some level of green farming, from sustainable, to organic to the more wholistic biodynamic approach. In general though, none of our suppliers are

at the moment interested in becoming certified by an organic or biodynamic agency (such as Ilea or Demeter) because of the high costs involved with the certification and because they feel that the rules and regulations of such agencies are too tight and restrictive. And for small size wineries, as are many in the Vias portfolio, compromising a year’s harvest is not an option.

Though it is hard to categorize, below is a list of all the Vias green producers with an indication of their “level of green-ness”.

● **ABBAZIA DI NOVACELLA (Sustainable):** Sustainable viticulture is the norm in all of the Abbey’s own vineyards and even for sourced grapes. Alto Adige is on the fore-front when it comes to ‘green’ management. Urban von Klebelsberg, the Abbey’s managing director, reports that almost 15 years ago they had tried to take a full-fledged organic approach, but that did not quite work for them: the vines would develop small diseases that were impossible to cure while adhering to strictly organic regulations. This had an impact on the overall quality of the grapes so they decided to take a step back.

● **ARGIANO (Organic, not certified):** Argiano’s commitment to the ‘green’ movement is due to its active wine-maker Hans Vinding Diers who, already fully involved in his Patagonia project, naturally spread his interest over to Argiano, aided by his friend Monty Waldin, a leading expert on organic wines.

● **ARGILLAE (Sustainable):** This winery in Umbria, located northwest of Orvieto, boasts over 170 hectares planted with vines. Argillae practices a sophisticated kind of sustainable farming called ‘lotta guidata o programmata’ in Italian (literally translated as ‘programmed or guided fight’). This means that the use of specific vineyard treatments are *guided* by the use of special boxes and traps spread throughout the territory to detect particular diseases or pests. Depending on the level of danger detected, agronomists can decide whether or not they need to intervene and how drastically.

● **BODEGA NOEMIA DE PATAGONIA (Certified Biodynamic):** Patagonia has a naturally organic climate, humidity does not exceed 30%, making the climate very dry, thus not prone to diseases. Vineyards at Bodega Noemia have received official biodynamic Demeter certification in 2009. Aided by famous South American consultant Rene Piamonte, the winery produces on the farm 7 out of 8 preparations exclusively from our own resources. These preparations were designed by Rudolph Steiner, father of biodynamics. These are spray or compost preparations that are central to the biodynamic approach to spur the vitality of the land and the proliferation of seeds that Steiner believed to be corrupted by chemicals. One preparation (no. 500) calls for enriching a farm soil by filling a cow’s horn with cow manure and burying it in the field over the winter, then mixing the content with water to spray in the fields.

● **CASTELLO DI LISPIDA (Biodynamic, not certified):** Alessandro Sgaravatti follows the same direction. His winery Castello di Lispida in the Euganean Hills about 30 miles west of Venice, is all about nature and his “winemaking is as natural as you can imagine”. Alessandro used to be a neurosurgeon and, for a man of science, he is surprisingly receptive to non-scientific approaches to winemaking. His masters are Josko Gravner and Masanobu Fukuoka, the Japanese father of natural agriculture. He too uses terracotta

VIAS “GREEN” PRODUCERS

(in alphabetical order)

- Abbazia di Novacella
- Argiano
- Argillae
- Bodega Noemia
- Castello di Lispida
- Castello di Luzzano
- Castello dei Rampolla
- Cogno
- Colle Santa Mustiola
- Corte dei Papi
- Damilano
- Damijan
- Fattoria San Fabiano
- Fattoria San Lorenzo
- Ist. Agr. San Michele
- Le Due Terre
- Le Presi
- Marengo
- Pecchenino
- Principiano
- Tenuta di Pietra Porzia
- Tenute Dettori

amphorae to make his Amphora line of wines. When asked "Why terracotta?", Alessandro explains that there are two main reasons. The first is more philosophical: the grape takes its life from earth - and terracotta, which is literally "baked-earth" symbolizes a return to its origins, a sort of rebirth. The second, more practical, reason is that terracotta allows for long maceration as it is porous enough to let some air in. Terracotta is much less aggressive than oak.

- **CASTELLO DI LUZZANO (Sustainable):** Luzzano was among the first wineries to adhere to, since the early 90's, the first EU guidelines on integrated agriculture. The program lays down quantities and types of products that can be used to protect the integrity of the vineyards with low environmental impact. With the help of renowned agronomist Giampiero Romana, highly regarded in matters of organic viticulture, the winery utilizes cover cropping between the rows (*inerbimento* in Italian) to reduce yields, prevent soil erosion, and to produce organic compost, while wooded areas and bushes around the vineyards are maintained as ideal habitats for useful insects and birds. This type of farming does not require formal certifications, but the winery is subject to strict control visits by technical experts who inspect the vines on a regular basis and prescribe what treatments might be necessary and when to apply them.

- **CASTELLO DEI RAMPOLLA (Biodynamic, not certified):** Luca di Napoli, owner and wine-maker of Castello dei Rampolla located in the famous "Conca d'Oro" near Panzano, has been practicing biodynamics since 1994. He describes the vineyard "as an enormous digestive system". He furthers the use of preparations, such as herbal sprays, specifically developed through the process of "dynamization" and used to assist in connecting vines, flowers, soil and micro-organisms with the dynamic rhythms of the earth, the atmosphere, the moon and the zodiac signs. Everything plays a role in the big self-sustaining, self-regulating ecosystem of the vineyard.

- **COGNO (Sustainable):** All of the nebbiolo vineyards owned by the Corno winery are currently being managed in a sustainable fashion. All the work is done by hand and the use of chemicals is reduced to the bare minimum, totally avoided when nature permits. Valter Fissore, owner and winemaker, comments on how much time consuming and expensive this type of viticulture can be, so for now it is devoted only to the top vineyards, the noble nebbiolo used for making Barolo. He plans to gradually switch all his other vineyards too.

- **COLLE SANTA MUSTIOLA (Organic, not certified):** This winery, located in an unrecognized wine zone of Tuscany, is a dedication to sangiovese. The 4 hectares, that boast some 22 clones of the grape, are managed organically, with fertilization being based on organic manure with an annual integration of potassium and phosphate. All vineyard work is done painstakingly by hand and winemaking intervention is kept to a bare minimum. The underground cellar ensures that constant natural humidity and temperatures are maintained.

- **CORTE DEI PAPI (Sustainable):** The ideal microclimate of the area near Frosinone makes it possible for the vineyards to be managed sustainably, following the principles of integrated farming laid down by the EU.

- **DAMILANO (Sustainable):** Over the past few years the Damilano winery has worked with viticulturist Giampiero Romana to ensure the well-being of their estate-owned vineyards. Romana is very well known for his green approach and he has gradually shifted the vineyard management to a sustainable approach where systemic products are not used unless the general well-being of the harvest is at stake.

- **DAMIJAN (Biodynamic, not certified):** Not biodynamic by label, but increasingly compatible with those methods. His quest is for natural wines beyond the norm of technical accomplishment and tradition. The approach is decidedly non-interventionist: complete ban of stainless steel from his winery, natural yeast fermentation, long skin maceration (also for white wine), use of upright wood fermenters, respect of the bio-dynamic calendar and minimal levels of SO₂. The result is a living wine.

- **FATTORIA SAN FABIANO (Organic, not certified):** An historic property located just outside of Arezzo, where the current owners, Count Gianluigi Borghini Baldovinetti and his son Averardo favor a purely organic approach (*biologico* in Italian). The conversion process from conventional to organic practices began in 1992 and after 3 years the entire property was officially considered organic. Pesticides, synthetically compounded fertilizers and growth regulators are strictly forbidden and replaced by organic compost and biological pest and weed control substances. Sulfur and copper-based treatments are allowed, although because these get easily washed away by rain, applications may be more frequent. Fattoria San Fabiano refers to "Suolo e Salute" (Soil and Health), one of the several organizations recognized by the Italian government to act as a control authority for all organic producers and "organic wannabes". Suolo e Salute runs periodic checks by retrieving samples of soil, plants and also actual products to analyze and verify that no hazardous substance was used. In the case of non-compliance, it would have the authority to prevent the product from being released on the market. Suolo e Salute's website (www.suoloesalute.it) clearly differentiates between "control" and "certification", with the latter being the ultimate formal written certification of the organic production. Such certifications are considerably more expensive and many producers, including San Fabiano, forgo this last step, also to prevent such cost from affecting the final price of their wine.

- **FATTORIA DI SAN LORENZO (Biodynamic, not certified):** Natalino Crognaletti, current owner, smiles when asked about the current interest in biodynamic wines. Biodynamic practices are nothing new, just a new trend to describe his grandfather's farming and what was normally done on many farms for decades. Back in the days, fertilizers and pest control chemicals were expensive, so the tendency was to use only what nature provided on the property: ladybugs, bees, natural compost, the wind as well as the phases of the moon. Conventional agriculture makes everything easily accessible to the plants, whereas biodynamics forces the plants to reach deeper into the soil to get the nutrients which makes for stronger vines, lesser yields and increased concentrations. A natural wine is not an immediate wine, but it needs time in the glass to fully open and release its flavors. Acidity and minerality are marked.
- **ISTITUTO SAN MICHELE (Sustainable):** This regional institution practices sustainable farming in all of its vineyards (with 4 hectares fully organic on an experimental basis) and spreads its know-how among many of the wineries across the region.
- **LE DUE TERRE (Organic, not certified):** Organic, but with no official certification, is this 4-hectare property run by husband and wife team Silvana and Flavio Basilicata. Located in Friuli, just a few miles away from the border to Slovenia, the couple manages their vineyard with painstaking manual care, with no chemicals being used except for limited amounts of sulfur powder and copper treatments. Flavio's winemaking approach is "less is better". Trace quantities of SO₂ are added only at bottling to ensure stabilization of the wines, and bottling is preferably carried out when the moon is waning as it is thought to have calming effects on the wine.
- **LE PRESI (Certified Organic):** In 2001 the winery adopted the general protocol on organic farming and became a member of the AIAB (Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica, or the *Italian Association for Organic Agriculture*), one of the many agencies in Italy recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to oversee organic practices. The association began monitoring the winery's activity during the 3-year conversion process and starting with the 2004 vintage the winery is officially certified as organic. On a funny note, after reading the organic protocol for the first time, the winery's owners realized that their vineyard-management practices had always been compliant with the guidelines, therefore they had practically been an organic winery all along, ever since the first vineyards were planted in 1970.
- **MARENCO (Sustainable):** Marengo follows a two-fold green approach at their winery. Firstly, the winery has adopted the EU regulation n. 2078/92 on "integrated farming" that lays the foundations for sustainable viticulture all over Europe: the use of chemical fertilizers is reduced to the minimum (and enforced by local inspectors) while cover cropping and natural fertilizers (manure) are privileged. Insects and bugs in the vineyards are constantly monitored so as to intervene with special treatment only when absolutely necessary. Secondly, the winery has been fitted with a special 20 KW photovoltaic system for the production of electricity and a solar power heating system that will not only save on energy consumption, but also reduce the overall CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere.
- **PECCHENINO (Sustainable):** Orlando Pecchenino is convinced that the quality of his wine is strictly related to the natural health of his vineyard. His main objective is that of growing the best possible grapes, in terms of health and ripeness, with the lowest possible impact on nature. In the vineyards, he opts for organic compost and avoids the use of any chemical products for weed or pest control; his treatments in the vineyards are all natural unless it becomes absolutely necessary.
- **PRINCIPIANO (Sustainable):** Ferdinando Principiano declares that he does not like to be bound to strict organic or biodynamic criterias when it comes to handling his vineyards and making wine, so he opts for a more flexible, sustainable approach. In the vineyards, he has removed chemical plant foods, weed killers, dessicating agents, and chemical anti-mold treatments. He uses only natural yeasts and has abandoned all kinds of technology in the cellar. He conducts his alcoholic fermentation without temperature controls attempting to work in an environmentally sustainable manner in harmony with nature and conducts manual punch downs during the fermentation process.
- **TENUTA DI PIETRA PORZIA (Sustainable):** This large estate located just outside of Rome has applied the EU regulations on integrated farming for over a decade.
- **TENUTE DETTORI (Biodynamic, not certified):** Alessandro Dettori is a convinced supporter of natural wines. He and a group of other producers have formed a group called "VinNatur", one of many independent groups all over Europe advocating the return to simple natural winemaking while partly disassociating themselves from the mainstream organic and biodynamic authorities that are considered far too commercial and seem to have lost focus of the real spirit behind natural wines. Alessandro explains how a lot of international wines are made to suit the taste of consumers all over. Wine should not follow fashion and trends. Wine is made from the land it grows in and by the people who live in that land. Alessandro, with regained confidence, has started making wine again the way his grandfather used to (natural fermentations, no temperature control, no destemming, use of open-top cement vats). The best possible expression of his land.

MAKING SENSE OF “ORGANIC” LEGISLATION



In Italy, from a legal standpoint, it is not possible to discuss the concept of “**organic wine**” (*vino biologico*), as there is currently no official Italian or European law which regulates organic wine-making practices. It is acceptable, however, to legally use the phrase “**wine produced from organically-grown grapes**”. The European Union Regulation N. 2092/91 (and its subsequent amendments) is currently in effect in all European countries, including Italy, but it only regulates *organic grape growing* methods to be used in the vineyard (*organic viticulture*). The regulation does NOT, for some reason, regulate the vinification procedures in the cellar (*organic winemaking*). The European Commission is working on a new bill which will also include provisions for vinification procedures, but until then it is up to each individual country in the EU to establish their own specific legislation regarding the production of organic wines. At present, France is the only country in the EU that has written its own “organic winemaking constitution”. In Italy, instead, the legal framework for organic wine production is currently being overseen by the MIAFF. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MIAFF)** currently lists a number of Italian agencies (such as Suolo e Salute, Icea, Bios, Codex, AIAB, etc.) whose main role is that of controlling all organic practices, from the conversion to the maintenance of organic standards in all realms of agriculture, including viticulture. While the MIAFF is currently only supervising this area, there is still no official legislation in place pertaining to “*organic winemaking procedures*” in Italy.

In the United States, there are also a number of different regulations and agencies overseeing the organic grape-growing and organic wine-making practices. These regulations also pertain to wines imported into the USA. The **National Organic Program (NOP)** established a federal regulation in the USA through the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) on October 22, 2002, officially defining the production and the importation of all organic products into the USA, including wine. To further complicate matters, let’s not forget that the USA does not recognize the EU standards on organic grape-growing, therefore making it even more difficult for a foreign producer to become an accredited organic producer in the USA.

The most famous international certifying body for biodynamic agriculture is the **Demeter Association**. The entire farm must be certified by Demeter at once, and must be free of all outside

THE LEVELS OF “GREEN-NESS”

Integrated viticulture (*viticultura integrata*): Also called *sustainable farming*, this is the least stringent area of “green farming” and the most widespread. Here a wide variety of agricultural practices are used which are ecologically sound but are also economically viable. Farmers have more flexibility and will generally recycle, conserve water, use renewable resources, and minimize the use of chemical products, but chemical products can, in fact, be used in sustainable farming.

Organic viticulture (*viticultura biologica*): Organic farming is similar to sustainable (or integrated) in striving to conserve soil and water and use renewable resources, but it has some important additional rules and regulations. Organic farming prohibits the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and chemical-based fertilizers around all crops. Here all produce is high in nutrition, obtained with minimal use of auxiliary energy, and based on cultivation technology which has a minimal affect on the environment. There are many degrees of certified organic throughout the world, varying again by nation and by region.

Biodynamics (*agricoltura biodinamica*): Biodynamic farming is the most complicated philosophy of “green farming”. It is more of an holistic and mystical approach to farming, in which the entire wine estate becomes a self-sustaining, self-regulating ecosystem. Biodynamics treats “the farm as a living organism which is connected to the dynamic rhythms of the earth and atmosphere...working with the living soil and the invisible energies of nature”. Similar to organic farming, biodynamic farming eliminates all chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Biodynamic farmers also follow the natural rhythms of the earth and the moon’s lunar phases to increase the “life force” of the soil and, thus, create a wine which is completely authentic to the site. The needs of the farm are met completely from within, using 100% recycled organic waste, along with incorporation of various indigenous vegetation and prey/predator animals to make the estate complete.

artificial inputs for at least three years. This certification process is very rigorous, and the Demeter Association regularly inspects already-certified properties to ensure that the biodynamic philosophy is being practiced in accordance with regulation.