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Feature Article

VEGAN WINE

FROM SOIL TO GLASS

With Bruce Ewert,
 Professor Bubbly
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With an ever-increasing consumer base eating plant-based and vegan diets, and a world more conscious of the impacts of agricultural and winemaking practices on the environment it is important for sommeliers to be aware of the various definitions of vegan wine. Many view 'vegan' wines as those made without the addition of animal-based products in the winemaking process, such as gelatin, isinglass, casein and egg whites traditionally used as fining agents, but many are not aware of animal inputs in the vineyard. With limited or no requirements in many parts of the world to indicate the use of animal products in production, how can sommeliers, and ultimately their customers, make fully informed decisions? While the European Vegetarian Union's well-known 'V-Label' affirms wines made without animal inputs in the production process, does this interpretation of 'vegan' wine go far enough? The Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI) asked Bruce Ewert, the owner and winemaker at L'Acadie Vineyards in Nova Scotia (Canada) to dig a little deeper into the subject. L'Acadie Vineyards is certified Biocyclic Vegan Standard, and the first farm and winery in North America to be qualified to use the Biocyclic Vegan Quality Seal.



vegan Wine: from soil to glass

Association de la Sommellerie Internationale

(ASI): Please explain what is Biocyclic Vegan agriculture?

Bruce Ewert (BE): Biocyclic Vegan agriculture is purely plant-based organic farming. This form of cultivation excludes all commercial livestock farming of animals and does not use any inputs of animal origin in viticulture and winemaking — from soil to glass. Special emphasis is placed on the promotion of biodiversity, healthy soil life, the closure of organic cycles with cover crops and on humus build-up with compost and compost teas from grape pomace and other plant residue.

ASI: Many sommeliers view bio-dynamic, organic, natural and even vegan through the same lens. Can you elaborate on differences?

BE: Perhaps for more understanding it is a good exercise to have a look at the different approaches of Biodynamic, Biocyclic Vegan and organic agriculture in general. Biodynamic and Biocyclic vegan are both based on the principles of organic farming with its positive impacts on the environment, climate, soil life, biodiversity, human health — and finally quality and taste. Both cover organic certification but at the same time they exceed the requirements of official organic certification schemes in many aspects, so both can be considered to be even more sustainable.

Biocyclic Vegan practices, however, diverge when it comes to animal use. Biodynamic farming, has animal husbandry as its foundation using manures, slaughterhouse waste as fertilizers and other preparations based on animal parts. It is optional for organic agriculture, not as foundational. Biocyclic Vegan agriculture, however, strictly refrains from keeping farmed animals and prohibits all animal inputs. This helps to avoid the largely documented negative impacts of the livestock industry with respect to climate, land use, water quality (nitrification), health (antibiotics and multi-resistant germs), global food security (cultivated plants being used for animal feed and not for human consumption) etc.

Learn more at: www.biocyclic-vegan.org/benefits

ASI: How do you read labels?

BE: Organic winemaking is the logical final step to shepherd organic grapes to the bottle, and both Biocyclic Vegan and Biodynamic wines have to be organic to use their additional logos on the bottle. USDA Organic, EU Organic and Canada Organic Standard all have a limited list of natural and non-GMO additives that are allowed. The resulting organic logo on the bottle signifies traceability and third-party inspections to give consumers confidence, but if the wine is not certified organic with the logo on the label, the grapes can be from conventional sources, even if the winery estate vineyard is certified organic. Both Biocyclic Vegan wine and Biodynamic wine have their own additional logo and the same disconnect in traceability happens if they are not on the label. The major difference for Biocyclic Vegan wine compared to Biodynamic is that it prohibits all animal inputs in winemaking, which can include gelatin and egg whites.

ASI: How does 'natural' fit into this equation? Or can it with its lack of definition?

BE: Certified logos with standards and inspections are the best way to wade through marketing jargon. Individuals that follow a vegan diet want to know ingredients and practices — they are intent label readers.



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