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Statewide Viticulture Extension

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**Mac Donald Speaks about Oregon LIVE program**

Tim Martinson, Hans Walter-Peterson and Alice Wise

From a humble beginning as 'coffee shop' discussion group by a handful of vineyard managers in 1996, Oregon's LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) sustainability certification program has grown to encompass 8,000 acres of grapes and 97 vineyards - 44% of Oregon's total grape acreage.

**Oregon LIVE, Inc.**, a private non-profit organization supported by membership dues and fees, manages a certification process that allows Oregon's wineries to put 'green' labeling, including international IOBC (International Organization of Biological Control) and 'Salmon-Safe' certification labels on their products.

Ten years after its inception, LIVE certification is a key selling point for small and medium-sized wineries selling to restaurants and sustainability-oriented consumers in the Northwest.

Al McDonald, a pioneering Oregon grape grower, founding member of the LIVE program, and viticulture instructor at Chemeketa Community College in Salem OR, gave two presentations in the Finger Lakes and on Long Island outlining how the LIVE program organizes certification of sustainable viticulture practices.

**How the LIVE program works.** McDonald described the program's founding objectives and how the certification process works.

The program starts with five objectives:

- To see the vineyard as a whole system
- To create and maintain a high level quality fruit production
- To implement practices that reduce reliance on synthetic chemicals and fertilizers with the goal of protecting the farmer, the environment, and communities at large
- To encourage responsible stewardship of the land, maintain natural fertility and ecosystem stability
- To promote sustainable farming practices that maintain biological diversity in the whole farm

LIVE certification carries the following requirements

- The entire farm must be enrolled
- Grower signs a contract with LIVE
- Certification is available after 2 years (Salmon-Safe endorsement after 1 year)
- Growers adhere to a list of 'encouraged' and 'regulated' inputs
- A whole-farm plan detailing ecological 'risks' and ecological 'structures' is required
- An action plan for improvement is required.

Central to the program is a color-coded **technical scorecard** describing program requirements and practices. Red items are those required for certification, including record-keeping on inputs and adherence to the list of approved pesticides and practices. Plant protection practices are divided into Green (cultural practices such as canopy management to reduce *botrytis*) and Yellow (chemical management practices). To be certified, growers have to adhere to 100% of the 'Red' items; 95% of the 'Yellow' items, and receive 50% of the available points for 'ecological diversity'.

Certification involves periodic inspections by an independent 3rd party inspector, at a cost of roughly \$200-300. LIVE membership also costs \$175 per year (plus \$2 per acre above 20 acres). Farms are inspected after 2 years, and every 3rd year thereafter. At the inspection, growers are required to have a current LIVE 'scorecard' prepared, along with fertilizer and pesticide records. If inspection fails, permission to use the LIVE and Salmon-Safe logos is revoked.

**International and Environmental Endorsements.** LIVE certification includes endorsement by a European 'standards' organization called the IOBC (International Organization for Biological Control). Certification also carries with it the ability to use the 'Salmon-Safe' logo (<http://www.salmonsafe.org/>), indicating that riparian areas close to streams are managed to protect salmon habitat - an important goal in the Pacific Northwest. The IOBC ([www.iobc.ch](http://www.iobc.ch)) certification is important for marketing wine in the European Union.

MacDonald cited certification as an essential tool to make the LIVE program credible to restaurants and consumers. He cited interest by retailers in coming up with national 'definitions' of sustainability, much as was done with the national 'organic' certification standards by USDA several years ago. Driving this process is the recognition by interested companies that 'Sustainability' is a potent marketing tool in this era of climate change and global warming. Everybody is touting sustainability and 'eco-friendly' or 'green' characteristics - and merchants want a reliable way to determine what is 'credible'.

He also mentioned efforts such as Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) from the European Union and new efforts by the ANSI (American National Standards Institute) to define what environmental standards (and record-keeping) constitute 'Sustainability'.

The LIVE program has also been asked to provide guidance to Washington State areas - particularly the Walla Walla AVA that straddles the Oregon/Washington border in the east - on setting up a certification and labeling program there.

**Finger Lakes - Discussion.** The VineBalance program, centered around the NY Guide to Sustainable Viticulture Practices workbook and funded by the NY Farm Viability Institute, has provided outreach and educational materials to support adoption (and documentation) of sustainable production practices by New York growers. As this grant closes out at the end of the year, what happens then?

Following Al MacDonald's presentation, Tim Martinson and Hans Walter-Peterson led a discussion among the 40 participants on how this program should continue, and what role industry and extension programs should play in marketing and sustaining the program. Martinson argued that industry - wineries and processors - needs to take the lead role in deciding how to promote and provide the credibility - whether through certification or other means - for marketing the program. A key issue is: How to decide who gets to use the VineBalance logo in marketing their products, whether to major retailers or through point-of-sale promotional materials in winery tasting rooms.

Several participants indicated that 'green marketing' is likely to be increasingly important in the future, and being early adopters of a credible sustainable production verification will be better than playing 'catch up' later. The Oregon LIVE program, with its grower-driven organizational structure and verification standards, provides one model of how this might be accomplished.