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## Amazing Grapes Part III *What wine brings to table*

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Steve Ayers/VVN The wine industry lends itself to organic farming methods. All the vineyards in the Verde Valley employ organic practices, some even used ducks and geese to provide the weeding between the rows.

It is a known fact that wine gives more than it takes.

And it does so for a very long time.

The vineyards of Europe have sustained wine-based economies, mostly in rural areas with few other opportunities, for centuries. Those economies have survived fire, plague and world war -- recessions, depressions and the crusades.

If any industry outside of arms manufacturing is bullet-proof, it is wine.

In addition to its economic resiliency, it has done something few industries have done over the years. It has preserved landscapes, ways of life and cultures.

In a world that finds it increasingly difficult to manage growth, stabilize economies and maintain a sense of community, wine has shown it can act as a preservative.

Vineyards are the poster children of what the good life looks like, and because of the substantial investment they represent in both time and money, they can act as a bulwark against what modernization continues to strip away.

Just as the winemakers realized 10 years ago that the Verde Valley has all the attributes to make world-class wines, the rest of the non-winemaking valley is beginning to see that such an industry has huge advantages.

"Napa Valley is a multi-million-dollar economy because someone had the vision to turn it into a paradise instead of another city," says Alcantara Vineyard owner Barbara Predmore. "Those who live there reap the benefit of its beauty and a vibrant economy without having sold their souls."



"We need the box stores, the Wal-Marts, the Home Depots, and we all need places to live," Predmore says. "The question is, ultimately, what kind of place do we want to live in?"

"Do we want unchecked urban sprawl, with growth for the sake of growth, or do we want something sustainable that blends and balances itself with the land? It's our home. It's up to us to decide how it looks."

Among economic and land use planners the wine industry serves as a model for that all-encompassing and broad term -- sustainability.

Almost cliché from over use, sustainability roughly translates: Take what you need but leave the world fit for your kids.

Jodie Filardo, an economic planner for the City of Sedona, divides her definition of sustainability into sustainability with a big "S" and sustainability with a little "s."

"The big "S" means the wine industry can help sustain the whole Verde Valley-Sedona area from an economic point of view because it brings in a new market segment for us.

"It brings in jobs directly related to the making and distribution of wine and related fields. It also deepens our tourism appeal and gives visitors a reason to come back again and again. And it preserves our agricultural roots and heritage."

"But you can also look at it from the little "s" -- the green perspective. The wine industry works from that angle as well, because of the nature of vines. They conserve water. They use land that might otherwise be unusable. And every grower I'm aware of is using organic techniques."

If there is a local spokesperson for the big "S" side of sustainability it is Cottonwood Economic Development Director Casey Rooney.

Rooney has helped lead the charge for growing the local wine industry by coordinating the newly formed Verde Valley Wine Consortium, a group of locals dedicated to its promotion and education.

He says he is doing so because he believes that wine is the perfect industry and the perfect catalyst for growing the valley in a manner fit for the landscape.

"In a rural area we are not going to bring in a General Motors or a Motorola plant. And quite frankly we probably don't want what they bring with them. But the wine industry can bring us wealth, provide better jobs and improve our quality of life, the very definition of economic development," Rooney says.

"I'd rather see 10 small wineries employing 10 people each than one company employing 100 people. This is what is good for the economy. This is the bright and shining star. We shouldn't forget other opportunities, but this is the low-lying fruit that will also spur a lot of other compatible activity,"

Rooney says he sees another advantage of having a vibrant wine industry in the valley.

"I always take representatives of businesses that are interested in coming to our community out to the wineries. It really helps sell the Verde Valley because of the quality of life it creates. I've never taken anyone out there that didn't have a really good time," he says.

And whether you see wine from the economic development side or the vineyard side, the advantages it brings to the little "s" definition of sustainability are a huge bonus in the long run.

"Grapes are the primo crop around here," local restaurateur Paula Woolsey says. "People don't realize that the usage of water is minimum. That's real important as far as the region's future."

Not only does wine have an advantage of low water use, but vineyards also create open space, stabilize the land and are esthetically pleasing.

And there is a trend in the wine growing industry to get away from chemical farming.

"It appears to me that more and more wineries are going organic," says Page Spring Cellars owner Eric Glomski. "To me it only makes sense. I can't imagine doing it any other way. I do think it's part of the whole culture and connectivity to these things.

"I can't imagine producing a wine that you are going to put in your body, or have a vineyard I let my kids run around in, that has been sprayed with some petrochemicals."

Talking to those who "get it," as Rooney likes to say, those who see what wine brings to the table for any community, there is one prevailing belief. The wine industry in the Verde Valley not only has room to grow, but needs to grow if the valley is ultimately to save itself from the ravages of growth.

"We must band together to create a different lifestyle, one that is sustainable, livable and based on an economy that does not consume itself," Predmore says. "I believe this model is worth some serious, serious consideration when we look at this valley's future."

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