

Walla Walla's Woodward Canyon Winery works toward sustainability through partnerships

Sandra Cannon sustainable living center
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Woodward Canyon Winery's garden and the business' Reserve House with solar panels on the roof. Colby Kuschatka, courtesy

Woodward Canyon Winery is not only one of the oldest wineries in the Walla Walla Valley, it is also one of the most sustainable — and now it's a Smart Business Partner.

Smart Business Partners is a program of The Sustainable Living Center (slcww.org) in Walla Walla.

What does that mean to you, the wine lover? It means Woodward Canyon Winery has, for years, been focusing on reducing waste and the winery's use of energy, water and materials (especially hazardous chemicals) — the four mantras of the Smart Business Partner Program.

This puts a better wine in your bottle at a lower cost.

How did Woodward Canyon do it? When they first were making wine, they tried to reuse their bottles through a sterilization program in Seattle. However, that required taking the bottles to Seattle, which meant extra greenhouse gas emissions.

With a sterilization and reuse program not readily available, Woodward Canyon Winery took a different approach. They narrowed their bottle types to two and sought lightweight wine bottles. Their wine bottles have 22% less glass, weighing 468 grams instead of the former 600 grams.

How is a lighter-weight wine bottle more sustainable? It reduces transportation costs as well as greenhouse gas emissions by using less fuel. For every 1,000 cases shipped 60 miles, the lighter bottles keep 364 pounds of carbon dioxide from being emitted.

Because our area does not yet have a sterilization process for reusing wine bottles, Woodward Canyon is recycling them with local group Ground2Ground Glass. The bottles are crushed into sand. Woodward Canyon then uses some of the sand for pathways at the winery. This precludes the company from paying to dispose of 1 1/2 tons of wine bottles at the landfill each year.

Energy reduction also translates into lower carbon dioxide emissions, not to mention cost savings.

Woodward Canyon Winery has radiant floor heat in its reserve house fueled by propane, and photovoltaic panels power the house's electricity. Because floor heat is more efficient than forced air, the facility now uses less propane annually.

The photovoltaic panels not only supply free electricity for the facility via thermal energy conversion (versus solar radiation) but they also generate, on average, 1,983 kilowatt hours annually to sell back to Pacific Power.

Woodward Canyon also participates in Pacific Power's Blue Sky program, which in 2021 supported 38,400 kilowatt-hours of renewable energy. It would take 58 solar panels to generate that much in a year.

Additionally, while not contributing directly to Woodward Canyon's energy and greenhouse-gas reduction, their use of mostly 100% recycled content paper towels and toilet paper eliminates 104 kilowatt hours of energy and 198 pounds of carbon dioxide released by the manufacturers.

Reducing hazardous chemicals in its operations is another key to Woodward Canyon's sustainable wine production. To reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides in the vineyard, the owners have introduced native plants that nurture predator insects and a ground cover that crowds out native weeds.

The native plants and ground cover play dual roles. The native plants require low-to-no irrigation, so less water. The ground cover also prevents erosion and reduces the need for irrigating the wine vines by keeping the soil more moist.

Nitrogen oxides from diesel fuel cause air pollution. Diesel exhaust fluid reduces nitrogen oxides. Woodward Canyon Winery uses diesel exhaust fluid in their newest, most-used tractor thereby lowering nitrogen oxides and so reducing air pollution.

Reuse is another factor that adds to Woodward Canyon's sustainability.

Grape skins are picked up by Basin Disposal and reused at a feedlot for cows. Corks are sent to Recork to be recycled into Sole shoes. And in 2021, over 1,000 wine boxes were reused, precluding 1 1/2 tons of corrugated cardboard going to the landfill or even the recycling system — not to mention saving a chunk of change for the winery.

Woodward Canyon Winery is on the cutting edge, beta testing a viticulture sustainability standard for the Walla Walla appellation.

As grapes are grown, harvested and made into wine, a multitude of environmental factors are prioritized. This includes everything from maintaining biodiversity on vineyards thereby ensuring soil health, to implementing recycling measures that conserve water as grapes are growing, to using renewable energy technology as wine is being produced.

Woodward Canyon seeks continual improvements in a winemaking process that protects the environment, supports social responsibility, maintains economic feasibility and produces high-quality wines — a great success story for one of Walla Walla's newest Smart Business Partners.

To become a Smart Business Partner, contact technical representative and energy auditor Dave Dahlin via email at smartbiz@slcww.org or by phone at 509-524-5218.

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