

# Domaine Saint George

## LISA (Low Impact Sustainable Agriculture)

The "LISA" Approach to agriculture is a commonsense one: it is based on the fact that as grape growers (who may also make wine), it is in our best interest to treat our land in a way that will keep it healthy and productive indefinitely. And because we live on or near this land, and work on it almost daily, we want it to be environmentally safe. So we farm as naturally as possible. We farm in a way that minimizes any alteration in the soil's natural cycle of replenishment and regeneration: "low impact" farming. At the estate vineyards of Domaine Saint George in the Russian River Valley (Healdsburg), Sonoma County, and in the vineyards from which we contract grapes, we follow these practices:

### WHEN PLANTING VINEYARDS

- We lay out the new vineyards in east-to-west rows, both for maximum exposure to the afternoon sun and so that the prevailing winds from the north will blow across the vines, helping to dry the leaves and bunches of grapes after rains and to blow away many flying insects. We use vertical trellising to promote these results.
- We place extensive drainage systems underground to catch excess water during rain, thus avoiding surface erosion and the disturbance of surface soil with channels and ditches.
- We install drip irrigation, which has four benefits:
  1. It places water in measured quantities close to the vine, thus eliminating surface runoff.
  2. The water is aimed at the soil a few inches away from the vine and thus causes the roots to stretch out toward the water, enhancing the vine's vigor.
  3. Nutrients can be added to the water to improve the vine's productivity: this is called "fertigation" ("fertilizing" + "irrigation").
  4. We conserve precious water.
- Because we do not use tractors for cultivation, we can plant the vines rows closer: narrow rows mean better utilization of the land and up to a certain point, greater density is understood to "stress" the vines and enhance their vigor.

### WHEN MANAGING THE VINEYARDS

- We encourage cover crops that create habitats for beneficial insects and that build soil health. These can be cereal grains, native grasses, or clover, which are nitrogen-fixing legumes and are thus natural fertilizers. Cover crops reduce soil compaction, benefiting vine growth. They also reduce dust: dust is an ideal home for predatory mites which eat grape leaves.
- We till the soil minimally, thus retaining natural cover and minimizing erosion and dust.
- We use a variety of techniques of vine management during the growing season to reduce the opportunities for pests and diseases, such as shoot positioning (arranging the new vine shoots along the wire trellis to orient leaves and grapes for the best result); canopy management (increasing or decreasing sun exposure to the grape clusters); and leaf pulling (judiciously reducing the number of leaves to affect the microclimate under the leaf canopy and thus the healthiness of the grapes).
- We carefully monitor the life cycles of each vineyard pest (some of which have two or three breeding cycles per year) in order to anticipate infestation and to control them through natural means.
- If insect sprays are required, we use the mildest pesticides available at the minimum effective level.
- Healthy vines, adequately nourished and appropriately watered, are an important factor in pest management, because they are less affected by insect damage.
- Canopy management (management of leaf growth on the vines by trellising and pruning) plays a role in vine health: open canopies bring light deeper into the canopy, promoting growth and reducing the opportunity for leaf hoppers which prefer a cool and shady environment. (If leafhoppers become a problem, a non-chemical solution is a sticky tape called Hopper-stopper; the tape is yellow, but the insects perceive it as green and fly to it.)

- We use compost to increase micronutrients and microbial activity for healthier, more competitive vines.
- We encourage habitat around the vineyards where predators such as owls and bats can thrive; buckwheat and deer grass harbor beneficial insects.
- When spraying is essential, we use spraying techniques which minimize the consumption of water and which spray the vine canopy very efficiently, with minimum spillage. Vineyard worker protection is assured.
- We return the pomace from our grape press to the vineyards. In the case of the Cabernet Sauvignon grown at the winery, this practice retains the "home" strain of natural yeast in the vineyard with which the wine is fermented each successive year; this is a vital component of the unique style of our estate grown and bottled Cabernet Sauvignon.

## The "Sonoma Green Business" Award

Domaine Saint George Winery has received a unique recognition of its efforts to be an environmentally sound business: the "Sonoma Green Business" award. This distinction is awarded by a coalition of environmentally concerned agencies and citizens throughout Sonoma County and includes representation from the United States Environmental Protection Agency. A single comprehensive visit by the Green Business evaluation team determined that all of the winery's production activities, including energy and water conservation, waste water management, pollution prevention, recycling, waste reduction and vineyard management met or exceeded coalition standards. Only 10 of the 130 wineries in Sonoma County have received this coveted award.