

Pushing Beyond Sustainability

FERRARI-CARANO
LEADS THE GREEN
CHARGE IN SONOMA

by Rina Bussell



Ferrari-Carano's Black Angus steer graze on the estate grounds.



A younger Don Carano and Ferrari-Carano Director of Vineyard Operations Steve Domenichelli inspect their vineyards with care.

ADHERING TO SUSTAINABLE winегrowing means a producer must constantly update its production methods and operations to improve environmental health and social impact while also remaining economically viable. Research shows consumers are 92 percent more likely to buy a sustainable wine, with 63 percent of them willing to pay a higher price for it, according to the Sonoma County Winegrowers.

In response to this increased market demand, the Sonoma County Winegrowers committed to becoming the nation's first 100 percent sustainable winегrowing region by 2019. They also conceptualized a logo, finalized at the beginning of this year, to distinguish Sonoma County's Certified California Sustainable Winегrowing (CCSW) wines from their industry peers.

As a Certified California Sustainable producer since 2015, Ferrari-Carano owns 24 vineyard ranches, which total 1,900 acres across six appellations. It volunteered as the first winery to put the green "Sonoma County sustainably farmed grapes" logo on 24,000 cases, and in August 2017, the company also finished updating its Alexander Valley production facility to meet the California Green Building Standards Code.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FERRARI-CARANO

Ferrari-Carano's website features a comprehensive list of its practices, leaving no stone unturned in its aim to increase sustainability while reducing its carbon footprint. The winery saves 27 million gallons of water annually through the use of its propane-powered wind machines and targeted drip irrigation and misting systems; another 35 million gallons is saved per year thanks to upgraded in-house reclaimed water facilities and a city recycled treatment center:



Fourth-generation farmer Steve Domenichelli has been a part of Ferrari-Carano for more than three decades.

What's perhaps even more impressive, though, is how much Ferrari-Carano had already implemented far before it officially earned its certification. According to Director of Vineyard Operations Steve Domenichelli, the driving force behind the company's trend toward sustainability is a deep sense of hospitality that stemmed from late founder Don Carano, who he says believed in being kind and aware in all situations.

The impact Don had in his approach to winegrowing and the close relationship they had for more than three decades is clearly evident in the warmth of Domenichelli's voice. He says carrying on Don's legacy and improving sustainability go hand in hand, and from a young age, Domenichelli has shared Don's philoso-

phies about the treatment of land: "Never be greedy. Don't take more than what the land can give you," Don would admonish him during the selection of vineyard sites. Don continuously maintained that as guests of the land, they should not only improve environmental health, but also make sure to not upset ecological balance and natural productivity.

As a fourth-generation farmer, Domenichelli believes the 5,000 acres outside of the vineyards is just as important as what falls within their boundaries. In this spirit, Ferrari-Carano built an irrigation reservoir to bring wide-mouthed bass and eagles back to the land. It also stands against Clean Land Farming (the removal of all plants and trees along river embankments) to protect wildlife along the tributaries—as well as the steelhead that come to spawn in Maacama Creek—and began reintegrating plants, animals, and insects that would directly benefit the ecosystem within its properties. Finally, in 2015, 560 acres of Ferrari-Carano's land became Certified Fish Friendly Farming by the California Land Stewardship Institute.

While Domenichelli says getting everyone on board with the laborious process of sustainability was once a challenge, the visible benefits abundant in the landscape gave the team a stronger, more personal sense of responsibility for the land.

That sense of responsibility also applies to Ferrari-Carano's treatment of its employees: Twenty-five years ago, Don prompted the company to build rent- and utility-free housing for roughly 100 of its workers in addition to feeding them and their families with Ferrari-Carano's own Black Angus steers, chuckwagon, and pro-

duce from its gardens. Because the housing is onsite, the employees can walk to work most days and reduce their gas usage.

"I'm constantly auditing myself. How can I be a better person? How can I make money and be a great manager at the same time?" asks Domenichelli. It's obvious from Ferrari-Carano's practices that it serves as a leading example of not just sustainability, but of true stewardship as well. *SJ*

PASSING THE SUSTAINABILITY TEST

The Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing certification offers assurance to consumers that rigorous and continuous measures have been met regarding sustainability. Using the California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing, producers undergo an annual self-assessment test outlining 140 vineyard and 104 winery best practices. The scores fall within Categories 1-4, with 1 and 2 being considered sustainable (participants earn a passing score by achieving 85 percent of practices in Categories 1-2).

To maintain their certification, wineries must also keep extensive records of water, nitrogen, and energy usage along with greenhouse emissions. Continuous improvement needs to be documented and an action plan for the following year must also be submitted to a third-party auditor that substantiates the assessment and records.

TASTING NOTES

Ferrari-Carano 2017 Pinot Grigio, Russian River Valley Stone fruits tinged with orange rind and a granule or two of white pepper finish on the up with great acid.



Ferrari-Carano 2017 Dry Sangiovese Rosé, Sonoma County Just-ripe strawberry and a mélange of other racy red berries play against a bit of fresh basil and tomato leaf. —*Jessie Birschbach*

