BRAVIUM

Regenerative Farming Before It Was Cool

Regenerative organic farming is about building soil and ecosystem health to leave the land, waters, and climate in better shape for future generations. It goes beyond sustainable and organic, and draws from practices Indigenous people have used for millennia. It's something I have been working on for 10 years on my own, and I am finding that it not only benefits the land and environment, but the wines I make, adding the balance, subtlety and nuance that I seek in Bravium wines.

One of the main tenets of regenerative farming is keeping carbon in the ground. Sequestering carbon not only keeps it out of the atmosphere but helps retain the water and biological matter the soil needs to be healthy. Sixty percent of the biodiversity on Earth is found below ground, so a healthy soil is key to the ecosystem.

Regenerative organic farming often requires doing the opposite of what traditional farming does. For example, traditional farming uses tilling and discing to tear up the soil surface. Not only does this release carbon into the atmosphere, it doesn't allow for natural vegetation to take hold, removing the primary food source for the biological organisms in the soil. Instead, we use permanent cover crops to add nitrogen back into the soil and to create proper conditions for the worms, microbes, etc., that help keep soils healthy.

In my vineyards, we do this by supporting the pennyroyal and weeds that naturally grow there, then adding in non-native seeds to diversify the crop year-round. We also place beehives in the vineyards, as pollinators are important for cover crops. As an added benefit, soils that are biodiverse typically don't have to be treated with fertilizers and other chemicals—another important benefit of regenerative organic farming.

There are two elements to regenerative farming that make this a long-term approach rather than a quick fix: time and money.

When developing a new site, there's a time aspect. It takes longer for the vines to establish themselves in soils that have not been ripped, disced, or tilled, and there are likely to be more replants in those soils. In addition, dry-farmed vines take longer to get established (I find eight years as opposed to two). It is a sort of "tough love" approach with the young vines, but once established, they're stronger and more resilient in the long run.

Then there's the money element: regenerative organic farming is more expensive, but I view it as an investment rather than an expense. The use of chemicals is restricted, so work in the vineyard is done by hand and with a weed whacker. It's definitely a slower, more labor-intensive effort.

There are not a lot of wineries using regenerative organic farming yet—they're typically smaller producers like myself who own and farm their own vineyards—but recent studies on the effects are promising: initial findings show that regenerative organic farmed vineyards provide CO_2 absorption, water retention, increased microbial biodiversity, as well as better plant respiration and cooler canopy temperatures.

It confirms what I see every day: in the long run, regenerative farming improves not only the vitality of the vineyard, but the wines we produce from it.

Bravium

Linguistic origin: Latin / Meaning: prize, reward, gift