



## CALIFORNIA WINE MAKERS EXAMINE CLIMATE'S EFFECT ON THEIR INDUSTRY

MORNING EDITION, NPR, DECEMBER 17, 2019



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DAVID GREENE, HOST:

So California produces 90% of all the wine made in America. But historic wildfires, devastating droughts and other extreme weather have many in the business struggling with how to adapt to a changing climate. As NPR's Eric Westervelt reports, a growing number of vineyard owners in the country's best-known wine region are calling for less talk and some more action.

ERIC WESTERVELT, BYLINE: On the beautiful heat-lamped terraces and elegant tasting rooms of Napa and Sonoma, the cabernets these days are often paired with talk of extreme weather and a warming earth.

DAN PETROSKI: The romantic in me always believes that the wine industry is something that is long term.

WESTERVELT: At Napa's Larkmead Vineyards, head winemaker Dan Petroski shows me around the test plots he's preparing, 3 1/2 acres of experimental grape varieties from the Southern Hemisphere and the Southern Mediterranean.

PETROSKI: This research vineyard is focusing on the grape varieties that we believe will be important to Napa Valley or even to the future of California wine, as we're thinking about how the climate is changing here over the course of the next couple of decades.



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WESTERVELT: The idea is to find out which grapes do better in drought conditions or in an era of colder cold snaps and warmer heatwaves. Larkmead was founded in 1895, and Petroski is not looking to replace its famed cabernet. But he'll test for resilience and flavor - tryouts, you might call it, for which grapes will become supporting actors in the finished wines of a near-future warmer Napa. The test plots, he says, are part of a broader long-term strategy to try to mitigate climate change.

PETROSKI: How we think about irrigation or nonirrigating, or how we think about keeping the temperature down not only in the fruit zone, but on the canopies with installing misting systems and shade cloth. So we're going to be using this as an opportunity to test not only new technologies, but also to test the finished product.

WESTERVELT: In the absence of federal leadership on climate change, a growing number of wineries in Napa and Sonoma, like Larkmead, are trying to reduce their carbon footprints - organic farming, solar panels, composting instead of burning discarded vines. And most wineries in this region are now certified sustainable in the management of their energy, water and soil.

PETROSKI: But I'm not sure that's enough. We're dealing with a larger global issue of planet stability.

JULIA JACKSON: Part of a carbon project...

WESTERVELT: In neighboring Sonoma, sisters Katie and Julia Jackson aren't sure it's enough, either.

J JACKSON: And we need to stop talking about the problem; we need to actually start implementing and scaling the solutions now.

WESTERVELT: Julia and Katie are part owners of one of the world's biggest wine producers, Jackson Family Wines. They help run 42 wineries around the world, from California to South Africa. Jackson recently teamed up with another global wine giant, Spain's Torres Family Wines, to create International Wineries for Climate Action. Sitting at a picnic table overlooking the vines at their La Crema Winery, Katie Jackson says the new group's goal is nothing short of radically decarbonizing the world's wine industry.

KATIE JACKSON: It's an organization that's asking members to reduce their carbon footprint 50% by 2030 and by 80% by 2045. We need concrete, significant action immediately and also for the mid and long term.

WESTERVELT: To join, wineries pledge to meet those ambitious goals and show they currently get at least 20% of their energy from onsite renewables like solar and wind. And they have to agree to conduct a thorough carbon emissions inventory, audited by a third party every year, looking at all aspects of production through delivery. Jackson



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Wines has been measuring its carbon footprint for 11 years. One of several changes they made after an energy audit - they switched to lighter glass bottles, cutting their emissions footprint 3% and saving on shipping and production costs.

K JACKSON: Those are cute.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Oh, yeah. Sure.

WESTERVELT: So far, the new global wine climate group only has six members. Change comes slow in wine land. Tradition, not transformation, is often the ethos. It's an industry driven by personality and passion - individualists who are fierce competitors, sometimes averse to working together. Katie Jackson says that mindset has to evolve.

K JACKSON: We believe that our intelligence together is going to be more powerful and more impactful than any one winery trying to figure this out and go it alone.

WESTERVELT: There's another challenge - many small wineries can't afford to invest in climate resilience, such as an annual emissions inventory. They're struggling to get the harvest in and survive and may be spending any extra cash on new generators to adapt to the new normal of rolling power blackouts due to the heightened risk of catastrophic wildfires driven in part by climate change.

Eric Westervelt, NPR News, in California's Napa Valley.