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Respect the Land, Love the Wine: Stories of Choice.

Here are a few true stories of choices we've made that reflect our commitment to preserving natural resources without compromising the quality of our wine.

50/50 Give Back

If you plant an acre, preserve an acre

Our innovative approach to land conservation in Sonoma County, known as the “50/50 Give Back” plan, goes back many years. In fact, it’s one of our oldest traditions. Early on it was decided that for every acre of land planted in a Sonoma County vineyard, we would set aside another acre to help protect natural habitat and enhance established wildlife corridors. We think it’s not only a thoughtful choice, but also a smart one because it reduces soil erosion and improves irrigation systems, among other things. Frei Brothers Reserve continues that plan to this day. It’s nice to know that even though half of our land isn’t used to actually make anything, all of it makes a difference.

Redwood Row

Going out on a limb to expand a winery

When the Frei Brothers Winery in Sonoma had grown to the point that it needed to expand, it ran into a problem: a row of 21 mature redwood trees blocked its access to open land. The obvious answer? Cut them down. That would have been quickest and cheapest, but it also would have been heartbreaking. Instead, the winery chose to hire a specialist to excavate the trees, move them 50 yards away, and transplant them into fresh ground: one old tree at a time, 21 times. We hoped most of them would survive. Amazingly, they all did. It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it, because now we not only have a better facility to craft our award-winning wines, but we still have those 21 beautiful trees.

Russian River Valley Wetlands

Trading vines for win-win-win wetlands

When Frei Brothers Reserve was replanting the vineyards in the Russian River Valley county officials asked us to preserve seven acres of wetlands. We gladly said yes, and decided to do more to help protect the adjacent Laguna de Santa Rosa, a large tributary with a unique history and rich ecosystem. We not only redeveloped the existing seven acres of wetland, but we also removed 15 acres of chardonnay vines. Once we started, we kept going. So far, the project has restored 25 acres to a seasonal wetland and upland bird habitat. This area is home to a variety of wildlife integral to the vineyard’s natural ecosystem. Today we bring visiting groups onto the vineyard for educational tours. That seven-acre opportunity more than tripled in size and has becomes a true “win-win-win” for the grapes, the land and the community.

Small Choices Ladder Up to a Big Difference

Sustainability is a series of everyday choices

Frei Brothers Reserve is doing some BIG things when it comes to sustainability, like our 50/50 Giveback program, Redwood Row and the Russian River Valley Wetland projects. However, we make choices on a daily basis, many of them smaller decisions that ladder up to some big changes.

- **Recycled Railroad Posts.** Frei Brothers Reserve uses recycled rail steel for the T-posts that hold up the vine trellis; it's high-grade steel that has been used for years and can continue to serve a purpose in our vineyard for years to come.
- **Compostable Vine Ties.** Another sustainable item we use in the vineyard is twisty ties. Similar to what holds a loaf of bread in its wrapper, we use these ties to fasten canes (arms of the vine) to the trellis when pruning. Instead of going the plastic route like most vineyards, we found a supplier that offers biodegradable ties... it was an easy choice to make the switch.
- **Chipping Old Vines for Compost.** When grape vines reach the end of their lifespan many wineries will literally pull and burn piles of old vines; we couldn't see polluting the air like that. Instead, we chip our old vines and use as compost for the new vines – the chips make for great organic material and deliver nutrients right back into the soil!
- **Bird Boxes and Perches.** Pest control is top-of-mind for many vintners. We went back to basics here, too, and installed bird boxes and raptor perches throughout our vineyards. Owls nest in the bird boxes while other birds of prey such as hawks and eagles will perch around the vineyard and help to control the rodent population.

Packaging Refresh

New look, new ways to uncork sustainability

In 2012, our bottles are taking on a whole new look and feel. But with our redesign, we also saw a chance to consider, and reconsider, the whole package. Debuting this year, our sleek new labels will print on post-consumer paper stock, while we are working to switch our capsules from those made with plastic liners to those made entirely of aluminum—improving overall recyclability. We are also reducing our bottle weight to save over half a million pounds of glass annually, and changing our corks to a type that allows us to use all the bark that is harvested from the tree, not just a portion. What's more, we continue to “think outside the bottle” with new shipping containers printed with soy inks and made with recycled and virgin fibers. New design, new packaging, but the same core value: produce the best wine possible and take care of resources along the way. That's the real beauty of it.

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