

Beverage Journal



APRIL 2025

SUSTAINABLE VITICULTURE

SCALING UP REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE

THE FUTURE OF SOLAR PANELS
IN VINEYARDS



08



13



16

FEATURES

08
MINISTRY OF BREWING
The former St. Michael's Church in Baltimore provides one of the most unique drinking and eating experiences.

13
IS REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE POSSIBLE INDUSTRY-WIDE?
Wineries with experience going regenerative discuss the path towards large-scale adoption.

16
A RECAP OF ACCESS LIVE 2025
This year's highlights, plus an interview with WSWA president and CEO.

18
SUN-POWERED SUSTAINABLE VITICULTURE
Agrivoltaics, a new solar paneling system, supports agriculture while providing green energy.

DEPARTMENTS

02
PUB PAGE
Trump's First Months: A Bev Biz Perspective

04
NEW PRODUCTS



Cover Credit:
Courtesy of Sun'Agri



**TRUMP'S FIRST MONTHS:
A BEV BIZ PERSPECTIVE**

Will the president's pro-business stance lead to economic growth, or will policy changes introduce uncertainty into an industry that relies heavily on regulation, taxation, and global trade? While it's still early, there are already a few key areas worth examining.

**Regulation and Taxation:
A Business-Friendly Shift?**

One of the Trump administration's biggest promises has been reducing regulatory red tape. For the beverage alcohol industry, that could mean a lighter hand at the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), which oversees label approvals, tax collection, and compliance enforcement. If the TTB streamlines processes, we could see faster product approvals and less bureaucratic headache for producers.

Tax reform: the president has called for lowering corporate tax rates. While it's unclear how that will translate to specific industry-related taxes, potential reductions in excise taxes on alcohol—long a priority for industry advocates—could be back on the table. A business-friendly tax structure could provide a much-needed boost to all three tiers of the industry.

Trade and Tariffs: A Risk to Imports?

Trump's "America First" trade stance presents both opportunities and challenges for the beverage industry. On one hand, if manufacturing and business-friendly policies strengthen the economy, consumer confidence and discretionary spending could rise, benefiting bars, restaurants, and retailers.

On the other hand, the administration's

push for tariffs on imports could have a direct impact on the price and availability of foreign wines, spirits, and beers.

Additionally, any renegotiation of trade agreements could have ripple effects, particularly for the import-export relationships between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. If new trade barriers are introduced, it could lead to price increases.

**The Hospitality Sector:
Labor and Consumer Confidence**

If the administration successfully implements pro-business economic policies, we could see increased consumer spending on dining and entertainment—great news for beverage sales.

However, some concerns remain, particularly around immigration policies and labor shortages. The hospitality industry relies heavily on immigrant labor, both in service positions and supply chain roles. Stricter immigration enforcement and potential changes to visa programs could create staffing shortages, leading to higher labor costs and operational challenges.

Similarly, the agricultural sector—including vineyards, breweries, and distilleries—depends on a workforce that could be impacted by shifting immigration policies.

A Wait-and-See Approach

For now, the industry is in a holding pattern, waiting to see which policies take shape and how they will impact businesses.

As with any well-crafted cocktail, the right balance is key. Let's hope Washington gets the mix just right. ■

STEPHEN PATTEN PUBLISHER

Maryland • Washington, DC

Beverage Journal

Published Monthly by
The Beverage Journal, Inc.
(USPS# PE 783300)

Over 80 Years of Continuous Publication

BEVERAGE JOURNAL, INC.

President / Publisher Stephen Patten
steve@beveragejournalinc.com
410.796.5455

Board of Directors Lee W. Murray
Thomas W. Murray

Information Technology Director Peter Williams

EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief Kristen Bieler

Senior Editor Courtney Schiessl

Contributing Editors Alia Akkam, Arielle Albert,
Keven Danow, Jim Clarke,
Edward Durgin, Jeff Siegel

ART & DESIGN

Creative Director Larry Lee

Senior Designer Jeff Tsui

TECHNOLOGY & WEB

eCommerce Director Ian Griffith

Online Web Programming Vali Balescu

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print Services Manager Lee Stringham

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

MD & DC Advertising Sales Stephen Patten

National Advertising Sales Jody Slone-Spitalnik

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to
THE BEVERAGE JOURNAL, INC.
PO Box 2062, Williamsport, PA 17703

The Maryland Beverage Journal and the Washington, DC Beverage Journal are registered trademarks of Beverage Journal, Inc. All rights reserved.

Periodicals postage paid at Baltimore, MD and additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: MD edition; 1 year \$49.00 plus tax, 2 years \$79.00 plus tax, 3 years \$109.00 plus tax, FedEx Ground delivery \$85.00 plus tax per year per edition, single copies \$10.00 plus tax. DC edition; 1 year \$36.00 plus tax, 2 years \$60.00 plus tax, 3 years \$83.00 plus tax, FedEx Ground delivery \$85.00 plus tax per year per edition, single copies \$5.00 plus tax.

The opinions expressed by guest columnists are their own and not necessarily those of Beverage Journal, Inc. Beverage Journal, Inc. is an equal opportunity corporation.

Copyright 2025 Beverage Journal, Inc. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Not responsible for unsolicited material or advertising claims.

NEW HENDRICK'S OASIUM



LIMITED
RELEASE

DISCOVER AN OASIS OF

AROMATIC HERBS & BRIGHT FRUITS

PLEASE DRINK THE UNUSUAL RESPONSIBLY.
HENDRICK'S OASIUM GIN, 43.4% ALC./VOL. ©2025 IMPORTED BY WILLIAM GRANT & SONS, INC., NEW YORK, NY



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. BOANN DISTILLERY

Family-owned Boann Distillery has unveiled a trifecta of 94-proof, single pot still Irish whiskeys. One is finished in Marsala casks from Sicily's Cantine de Vinci; another in Madeira house Justino's vintage casks. Rounding out the collection is an expression finished in rare vintage Pedro Ximénez chestnut and oak casks from Málaga. All are packaged in bespoke bottles that evoke grain, water, and wood.

\$ SRP: \$69 per 700-ml bottle

🌐 boanndistillery.ie

2. HAMBLEDON VINEYARD

Acquired by Berry Bros. & Rudd and Symington Family Estates in 2023, Hambleton, England's oldest commercial winery, was established in 1952 by Major General Sir Guy Salisbury-Jones. Finally, the historic label's sparkling classic cuvée and classic cuvée rosé are available stateside. The former comprises Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier grapes from the 2019 harvest as well as reserve wines from the solera system; the latter, which has spent over four years on lees, bursts with notes of summer fruit.

\$ SRP: \$59.99 to \$64.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 hambledonvineyard.co.uk

3. COMPASS BOX

Every year, Compass Box partners with a female artist for the annual limited release of its pioneering blended grain Scotch whisky. For the 92-proof 2025 edition, which melds single grain from the Cameronbridge distillery aged for an additional two years in a first-fill Marsala cask with single grain from the Girvan Distillery and from previous vatted iterations of Hedonism, the bottle is graced with a transporting label by Argentine talent Sofia Bonati.

\$ SRP: \$150 per 700-ml bottle

🌐 compassboxwhisky.com

4. NOOH BY LA COSTE

Château La Coste has spent years hatching a collection of non-alcoholic wines, and the result is Nooh by La Coste. The sparkling and still rosé and white selections, all crafted from the Provence winery's Rosé d'une Nuit organic cuvée, undergo a state-of-the-art vacuum distillation that leaves them completely alcohol free and with just 3.5 grams of residual sugar.

\$ SRP: \$35 to \$45 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 chateau-la-coste.com/en

5. JACK DANIEL'S

Jack Daniel's first introduced a 14-year-old, charcoal-mellowed Tennessee whiskey in the 1900s, and now its oldest expression has finally made a comeback at a robust 126.3 proof that yields flavors of leather and butterscotch. Although it has the same mash bill as the classic—80 percent corn, 12 percent malted barley, and eight percent rye—this version was aged in barrels positioned on the upper levels of the rickhouse that were then moved to lower floors to extend the maturation process.

\$ SRP: \$149.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 jackdaniels.com

6. SPRINTER

The bubbly peach offering quickly became a favorite among fans of Sprinter, Kylie Jenner's breezy vodka soda in a can, so it's not surprising the sweet, juicy fruit is the star of Sprinter's first single-flavor four-pack. With no added sugar, the 100-calorie ready-to-drink cocktail (4.5% ABV) combines premium vodka and real fruit juice.

\$ SRP: \$9.99 per four-pack of 355-ml cans

🌐 drinksprinter.com



NOW AVAILABLE

Republic National Distributing Company's
New Online Product Search And Ordering Experience



DISCOVER NEW ITEMS

DIVE INTO BRANDS

SAVE YOUR FAVORITE PRODUCTS

SEARCH & ORDER WITH EASE

GET STARTED TODAY BY VISITING

www.eRNDC.com



7. NEW YORK COCKTAIL COMPANY

Linden Pride, the owner of West Village drinks hangout Dante NYC, has expanded his New York Cocktail Company portfolio. The bottled ready-to-serve range includes four Negroni variations—Classic, Chocolate, Mezcalito, and Espresso—developed by Dante beverage director Renato Tonelli, and now an Old Fashioned, crafted with PDT owner Jeff Bell. It features Milam & Green bourbon, sherry, apricot liqueur, and bitters, that can be elevated upon serving with an expressed orange peel garnish.

\$ SRP: \$29.99 per 375-ml bottle
🌐 newyorkcocktailcompany.com

8. PASSERELLES

Jackson Family Wines delves into the terroir of France's diverse Loire Valley with the Passerelles collection. The four 2023 bottlings, including a Chenin Blanc from Anjou, Sauvignon Blancs from Touraine Oisly and Sancerre, and a Saumur Cabernet Franc, are light-bodied, fresh, and decidedly food-friendly.

\$ SRP: \$25 to \$40 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 jacksonfamilywines.com

9. PENELOPE BOURBON

Penelope Bourbon has ramped up its Core Series with a wheated variety. The 95-proof whiskey, which joins the Architect, barrel strength, four grain, and toasted expressions, showcases a mash bill of 74 percent corn, 16 percent wheat, seven percent rye, and three percent malted barley. Its fruity aromas of apple and pear pave the way to vanilla, orange zest, and brown sugar on the palate.

\$ SRP: \$39.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 penelopebourbon.com

10. CHICAS DIVERTIDAS

In celebration of Megan Thee Stallion's 30th birthday, the Grammy Award-winning musician has rolled out her lively tequila brand Chicas Divertidas. First up: a premium blanco and reposado. Distilled at Casa Centinela, they are housed in striking bottles embellished with agave plant-reminiscent grooves and capped in dagger-punctured hearts.

\$ SRP: \$70 to \$80 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 chicasdivertidastequila.com

11. MIJENTA TEQUILA

Through its limited-edition Symphony Series, Mijenta puts the spotlight on barrel-aged tequila. Following last year's inaugural cristalino release, the additive-free, sustainable tequila from the highlands of Jalisco continues its exploration with a high-proof reposado matured for eight months. Made with staves from oak forests in Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, it embraces a proprietary toasting method that deepens the wood's impact on the banana- and caramel-laden spirit.

\$ SRP: \$89.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 mijenta-tequila.com

12. MODERATO WINES

Beloved at top Paris restaurants, alcohol-free wine brand Moderato has now landed in the U.S. The four iterations—blanc, rouge, rosé, and sparkling pétillant—are brought to life from Colombard, Merlot, Tannat, and Gros Manseng grapes grown on Moderato's own vineyards in Gascony with the cutting-edge Cuvée Révolutionnaire dealcoholizing method. The celebratory wines contain less than 0.5 percent alcohol and just 10 to 15 calories per 100-milliliter serving.

\$ SRP: \$25 to \$30 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 le-moderato.com



~ p i n a a q



DISTRIBUTE BY: INTERBALT FINE WINES & SPIRITS (301) 793-1818



MINISTRY OF BREWING

THE CITY OF BALTIMORE IS BLESSED

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | IMAGES BY ASHLI MIX PHOTOGRAPHY

There are some people who treat beer drinking like it's a religious experience. The Ministry of Brewing in Baltimore has taken that to a whole other level. The brewery's operations are based in the former St. Michael's Church, which dates back to 1857. The combination of beer, food, and historical ambiance provides one of the most unique drinking and eating experiences around.

The Ministry is also the latest to be featured in our series of articles on funny or quirky-named bars, taverns, brewpubs, and beverage establishments in and around Maryland and Washington, D.C. Co-owner Ernst Valery is still tickled remembering back to the Ministry's creation six-plus years ago when he and co-owners Mike Powell and David Wendell came up with the name.

"David Wendell and I were looking to start a brewery, and we fell in love with the idea of a church brewery," he recalls. "There was one in Cincinnati that we took a look at potentially doing. And then we went and saw an actual one in Pittsburgh. Those were our early inspirations. I am a real estate developer, and our group redeveloped the entire St.

Ernst Valery
co-owner
Ministry of Brewing



Michael's campus. We transformed the girls school, the boys school, and the rectory into apartments. Then when it came to the sanctuary, we said, 'Wait a minute. We've been looking at church breweries. We can put in a brewery. The name Ministry of Brewing was then born.'

He added, "We love the name, and we love the building. There's all this history that we get to take into the future and still have a community gathering space ... it's really cool."

The former St. Michael's had a storied history as a hub of community gathering and engagement. Many Charm City residents can still recall attending church services, christenings, and marriages there. The co-owners have gone to great lengths to respect this past by maintaining the essence of a local family gathering place.

Co-founder and brewer David Wendell commented, "What makes Ministry special to me is that it was a gathering place for people for over 150 years, and now it is again. The head brewer and I saved everything we could. We made the tables from old joists, with the burn marks from an 1890 fire still visible on some of them. It's a striking



**SHOW MORE
TO SELL MORE**

- ➔ Solid Shelves
- ➔ Maximum display
- ➔ Edgeless Doors
- ➔ Maximum efficiency

3141 Frederick Ave. Baltimore MD | 410-945-7878 or 800-848-7748 | careysales.com



combination of history and renewal that makes the vibe unique. I enjoy walking into the cathedral-like space every time, it makes you feel smaller in a good way.”

Valery said, “Our core customer is the Baltimore City community and it’s over 150 neighborhoods and close to 600,000 residents. But we are also proud Marylanders and serve our entire state. We also get visitors from across the U.S. – mostly, the DMV [DC, Maryland, and Virginia], but also from around the globe.”

Co-owner Mike Powell concurred, adding, “I still love experiencing the ‘WOW!’ factor expressions on our guests faces the first time they enter the Ministry doors and see our grand and majestic space.”

Valery is the builder of the group, and Ministry of Brewing is a prime example of a type of development he has long specialized in – adaptive reuse. He remarked, “I have a history in adaptive reuse, and my background is urban planning. The whole point is to preserve the building, but then take it into the future. We converted the old Chesapeake Building so that it now has restaurants on the ground floor, offices on the second floor, and then above we put apartments.”

He continued, “Adaptive reuse is both a redevelopment tool and a revitalization tool. But you have to make sure it’s both viable and sustainable. A vibrant city has elements of a 24-hour nature to it. You want to have retail support the residential, and the residential must support the retail, as well. So, people are not just there at night and not just there during the day. There are different ‘shifts’ that happen.” The Chesapeake, for instance, is a 24-hour building. There are people there at different shifts all of the time, all day long.”

But the Ministry would be nothing if it didn’t produce quality ales.

Powell’s face lights up when he talks about the product: “I have several favorites, but I would choose our Brown Ale, Old Maude for sentimental reasons. Old Maude was the



first beer we brewed at Ministry, and it is named after the first train locomotive of its type built in the United States for the Baltimore & Ohio railroad, my favorite railroad growing up as a child.”

Wendell added, “My favorite part of production is thinking up new drink ideas with Dave Macala, our head brewer. He makes great things without my help of course, but I try to dream up fun, science-informed combinations. Not all of my ideas are winners though, but we learn something from every experiment!”

Challenges, though, remain in all facets of the business. Valery stated, “We found COVID to be very challenging, and the recovery continues to be hard and slow. The event was a super shock to our system, and we are working through efforts to bring more people back out to

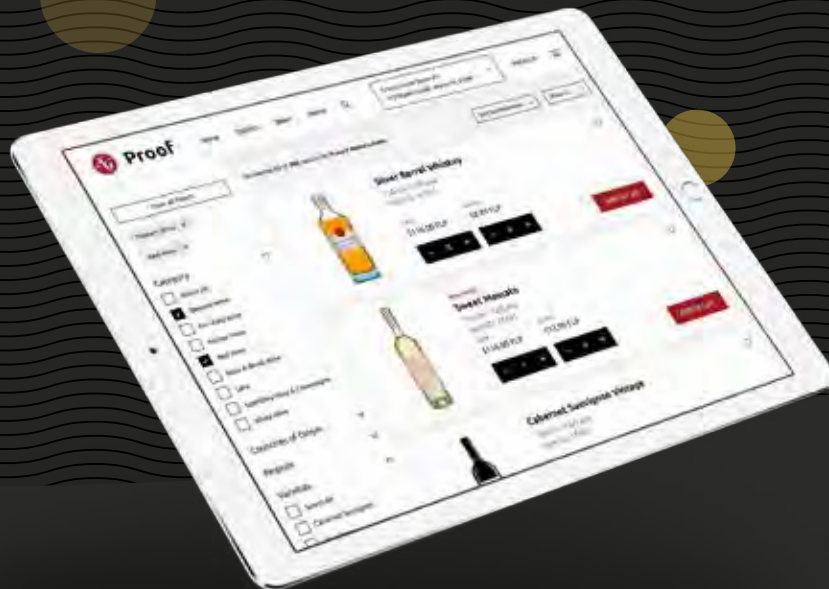
gather in greater numbers . . . and getting our beer outside of our city and state! We continue to look for partners and opportunities in other states and even internationally.”

Indeed, last year, the partners were able to transform a warehouse into an off-site production facility that includes a brewing system and canning line. They are now able to produce enough cans



Turning inventory.
And heads.

That's Proof.



Proof[™]
BY SOUTHERN GLAZER'S

Visit about.sgproof.com to find out more



this country with so much potential, including adding more special and private events, a kitchen to provide food, and expanding the Ministry distribution footprint through cans in and beyond the greater Baltimore market. I am eternally optimistic!" ■

to really get the Ministry's beers out into the Maryland marketplace more.

Asked about challenges, Powell responded, "One of our biggest is trying to predict how consumers' tastes will shape the future of the beverage market over the next three to five years." To this, he believes the Ministry is "ahead of the curve."

And all three men believe the future is bright for the business and the City of Baltimore, in general. Valery remarks, "The bev-

erage industry is a people business. Nothing brings people together like some good drinks, particularly beer! To be in this business, you need to constantly stay optimistic. My partners and I are proud of the great product we put out in the community and market every day, and it's the reason why we believe the best is yet to come for the Ministry and Baltimore City in 2025 and beyond."

Powell concluded, "We have one of the best community 'gathering place' spaces in



UPDATES = MORE SALES

Call today for your Assessment!



- ✓ New Doors
- ✓ New Lighting
- ✓ New Shelving = More Facings
- ✓ Serving the entire Mid-Atlantic region



Like us at
[facebook.com/CAREYSALESANDSERVICES](https://www.facebook.com/CAREYSALESANDSERVICES)



CAREY SALES & SERVICES

Serving the Local Beverage Industry since 1933

3141 Frederick Ave., Baltimore, MD

410-945-7878 or 800-848-7748 • careysales.com



SUSTAINABILITY

CAN REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE GO MAINSTREAM?

FOR REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL IMPACT ON THE WINE INDUSTRY, IT NEEDS TO BE ADOPTED BY BOTH BOUTIQUE WINERIES AND HIGH-VOLUME PRODUCERS

BY STACY BRISCOE

By now, the wine industry can agree: regenerative viticulture is more than a trendy buzzword. This holistic farming approach is gaining momentum as a proven method of increasing the health and vitality of soil, plant, animal, and even human life. But for regenerative farming to truly make an impact on the wine industry at large, it needs to be adopted by both boutique operations and large-scale brands.

Bonterra Organic Estates in Mendocino, California, which bottles nearly two million wines each year, was one of the first companies to embark on regenerative farming at scale. All of the company's 850 planted acres are Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) through the Regenerative Organic Alliance. These vines are

the source for Bonterra Estate Collection wines and the Single Vineyard Collection, bottlings that boast the ROC stamp since the 2021 vintage.

As leaders in this sector, the viticultural team at Bonterra is constantly educating the wine community on the benefits of regenerative practices. "We don't want to be the only ones doing this," says Joseph Brinkley, Bonterra's senior director of regenerative organic farming. But convincing more producers to move towards regenerative viticulture can be a feat; when a grower comes from a conventional farming background, says Brinkley, the notion of a new approach can be daunting.

The educational and financial barriers to going regenerative can represent major hurdles for some farmers, whether

they work hundreds of acres or just a few. Is it possible to overcome the challenges of transitioning and get the wine industry to adopt regenerative viticulture at scale? Here, wineries with experience going regenerative discuss the path towards large-scale adoption.

EDUCATION IS KEY

Stephen Cronk, the proprietor of Domaine Mirabeau, which distributes its recognizable rosé in more than 40 countries worldwide, experienced the challenges of going regenerative firsthand when he and his wife first purchased their 50-acre Provence estate in 2020. "We realized soon after we bought the property just how depleted the soils were," says Cronk. "We were always going to go organic, but

SUSTAINABILITY



Sheep grazing at Bonterra's McNab Ranch in Mendocino County.



Regeneratively farmed fruit at Robert Hall Winery in Paso Robles.

organic alone wasn't going to provide us with a pathway to repair our soils." Once he discovered regenerative, he knew this was what was needed to create a fully functional farm again. Today, Domaine Mirabeau is certified ROC and Regenified, but certified estate plantings only make up a small percentage of total production. It's here that he's hoping to make the most difference—convincing grower partners to transition.

This was, in part, his motivation to co-found the nonprofit Regenerative Viticulture Foundation (RVF). He wanted to help educate his partners, but also make regenerative more approachable to viticulturists worldwide. Cronk says that initial hesitations often come simply from not knowing where to start, what defines regenerative, and if certification is the right path for the business. "The great thing about applying regenerative practices is that the practices can be applied gradually and it's not necessarily a seismic shift," he says. "The RVF is trying to communicate that the barrier to entry can be low; it's more about understanding the principles of soil health and

"The great thing about applying regenerative practices is that the practices can be applied gradually and it's not necessarily a seismic shift."

—Stephen Cronk,
Domaine Mirabeau

working as part of a diverse ecosystem rather than a monoculture."

Caine Thompson, the head of sustainability for O'Neill Vintners & Distillers and a trustee for the RVF, agrees. He, along with his O'Neill colleagues and RVF cohorts, is dedicated to educating growers of all sizes on best practices toward transitioning to regenerative farming. The nonprofit conducts several online webinars as well as educational, in-person workshops. At the most recent live event at Robert Hall Winery in Paso Robles—where Thompson spearheaded the property achieving ROC status in December 2024—over 60 growers attended. "There's significant interest in regenerative farming from all types of growers from small to large," says Thompson.

The workshop also acted as the launch of RVF's One Block Challenge, a program encouraging farmers to experiment on

their own property on a small scale. "It could be their worst block, their least-performing block, so that they've got the least to lose—or maybe the most to gain," explains RVF programming director Becky Sykes. "They take that block and then they do some really simple monitoring measurements on it themselves. This can be anything from water infiltration tests, reduced tillage, or cover-crop usage."

HIGHER COSTS, BUT HIGHER QUALITY

The proof is in the progress. For O'Neill, it all started with a 48-acre test parcel of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Sirah at Robert Hall back in 2020. Tracking the success of the regeneratively farmed area versus that of the conventionally farmed control lot, the data was convincing enough to let the experiment size grow. "We've seen a cumulative six percent increase in yield and a seven percent increase in cost with regenerative organic farming versus conventional farming," says Thompson. "The yield increase is from less dehydration versus more fruit per vine, as the vines are more resilient to climate extremes. So, the fruit that's harvested has been of better condition and hence better quality."

The increased quality does come at a cost. "But the long-term benefits outweigh these initial costs," says Isabel Veá Barbany, the global communications director for Familia Torres, which grows wine grapes throughout Spain, Chile, and California. "We are changing the way we



Stephen Cronk, Domaine Mirabeau



Compost used on Jackson Family Wines' vineyards.



manage our vineyards and cutting down other costs by reducing the use of tractors and phytosanitary products, for example.”

Further, particularly in these dry climates, the increase in organic matter in the soil means better water-holding capacity, resulting in less rainwater and topsoil runoff as well as lower irrigation needs, where used. Familia Torres now has nearly 1,500 acres of vineyards managed with regenerative practices (certified through the Regenerative Viticulture Alliance and Ecocert) and plans to expand the approach to all estates. “What we have observed within the first few years was an increase in microbial biodiversity of the soils as well as the presence of insects and birds in the vineyards,” says Barbany. “By turning our vineyards into natural ecosystems, they are becoming healthier and more resilient and, we believe, will translate into quality wines.”

“When you think about it, any new business endeavor any time you’re going down a path, it’s going to be more expensive,” says Sarah Wuethrich, the winemaker for the Maggy Hawk, which is part of Jackson Family Wines. The company stewards over 10,000 acres of wine grapes across California, Oregon, and Washington, and aims to transition all estate vineyards to regenerative practices.

“If you’re making the switch—equipment, compost spreading, purchasing compost—first-time expenses add up,” says Wuethrich. But over time—as the soils rejuvenate, the vines adapt, and new

“The long-term benefits [of regenerative viticulture] outweigh these initial costs.”

—Isabel Vea Barbany,
Familia Torres

processes become routine—these initial costs depreciate. “And the longevity of the vineyard [increases],” she says. “Needing to replant and reestablish vines and wait three to five years for production—that’s expensive. One of our goals with focusing on these regenerative practices is to extend the life of our vines. It makes financial sense and, selfishly, I want to make wines from older vines. I feel they have more of a story to tell.”

DOLLARS AND DEMAND

Data is still being gathered as growers and producers analyze costs versus financial gain. “It’s hard to put a number on ROI as it depends on so many factors,” Cronk points out. “The main factor is the starting point of the vineyard. For example, if they’re already biodynamic and have high levels of organic life in their soil, then there are likely minimal additional costs—in fact, possibly savings. [But] if it’s a highly industrial set up, then the costs might be higher initially and the ROI more challenging.”

Brinkley also notes that results are highly dependent on the price point of the bottle or grapes being sold. “If you’re at the \$12 or \$50 or \$300 [per bottle] zone, it’s a different answer. The economics shift drastically for what consumers are able and willing to pay.”

To that end, Brinkley also stresses that when it comes to the viability of regenerative viticulture as a mainstream practice, the onus is on the consumer. “We can’t farm if people aren’t buying our wines,” he says. “I’d love to see a whole lot of consumer fire for regenerative or even organic. That’s when and where I think producers will respond. If there’s not a great market, producers have other things to worry about.”

Thompson echoes this sentiment. “In order for adoption to advance,” he says, “it will come down to consumers seeking our regenerative-certified brands and retailers and restaurateurs seeking regenerative-certified wines for their stores and restaurants.” ■



Caine Thompson, O'Neill Vintners & Distillers



INSIDE THE 2025 WSWA ACCESS LIVE

HERE'S WHAT YOU MISSED AT THIS YEAR'S BIG EVENT IN DENVER—PLUS, A DISCUSSION WITH WSWA PRESIDENT AND CEO FRANCIS CREIGHTON

It was another successful year for Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA)'s Access LIVE, which draws professionals from across the beverage industry to network, address industry issues, celebrate innovation, and discuss strategy. Held from February 3 to 6, Access LIVE headed to Denver for the first time this year, bringing together more than 2,000 wholesalers, suppliers, retailers, and other professionals at the Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center.

It's a turbulent time for the beverage industry, something that was addressed throughout the event, beginning with the State of the Industry address by Dina Opici, the president of Opici Family Distributing and the chairwoman of WSWA. From the impact of cannabis consumption and GLP-

1 medications like Ozempic, to legislative challenges like tariffs, the Section 199A tax deduction, and Dietary Guidelines update, headwinds abound, and Opici stressed the importance of advocacy for every beverage professional.

Panels on the LIVE Stage offered strategies and solutions for challenges, including the "What's Next for Trade Marketing?" panel, moderated by Beverage Media Group and *SevenFifty Daily* editor-in-chief Courtney Schiessl Magrini and featuring panelists Courtney Armour, the chief legal counsel for DISCUS; Justin Shaw, a partner in M.S. Walker; and Christina Stella, the SVP of supplier partnerships for Provi, the publisher of *Beverage Media*. Among their insights for wholesalers and brands: use digital tools to amplify traditional strategies, develop a compliance strategy for all

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Attendees taste at Access LIVE; "What's Next in Trade Marketing?" speakers Courtney Schiessl Magrini, Christina Stella, Justin Shaw, and Courtney Armour.

marketing channels, and get strategic with data analytics.

Several industry leaders were also honored for their legacies in beverage, including John "Jack" Aaron, the chairman of Athens Distributing Company and Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of Tennessee, who received the Lifetime Leadership Award, and Michael Mondavi, the cofounder of Robert Mondavi Winery and founder of Folio Fine Wine Partners and Michael Mondavi Family Estate, who received the Ray Herrmann H.E.R.O. award.

During Access LIVE, Schiessl Magrini sat down with Francis Creighton, the president and CEO of WSWA, to discuss the state of the industry—and how WSWA plans to support it—right now.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF WINE & SPIRITS WHOLESALERS OF AMERICA



WSWA's Francis Creighton (center) with Courtney Schiessl Magrini (left) and Provi's David Wojnar (right).

COURTNEY SCHIESSL MAGRINI (CSM): Here we are at another Access LIVE! What priorities and initiatives are you focusing on in the coming year with WSWA?

FRANCIS CREIGHTON (FC): We're primarily an advocacy organization, and we have our work cut out for us this year with everything happening on Capitol Hill. Tariffs

are certainly an important issue—the last thing we need in our industry is prices going up on our products.

But we also have a lot of other issues—in particular, taxes. In 2017, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act passed ... and included was a provision called 199A, which softens the delta between the tax rate for publicly traded companies (21 percent) and family-

owned companies (who would otherwise be subject to a personal tax rate of 38 percent). That provision expires this year. That's the most important thing because it would dramatically change the economics of the wholesale tier, which is largely made up of family-owned companies. Also, estate taxes—we want these to remain family-owned companies, and that means being able to pass the company from one generation to the next.

Additionally, we believe strongly that cannabis needs to be regulated. Beverage alcohol is an intoxicant as well, but it is regulated—it has age restrictions, trade practice rules, and more. We think alcohol is the best model for regulation, but it's not the only model. The key thing is that we're talking to legislators, and we're saying, "If it's going to be out there, you have to regulate it." We think that's just common sense.

CSM: This year, you welcomed your first female chairwoman, Dina Opici. How did the membership come to the decision to name her chairwoman, and what does this reflect about a broader shift in the wine and spirits industry?

FC: This is the culmination in a three-year process for Dina, where she started out as our treasurer of the board, and then she became vice chair, and now she's the chair. I think it does reflect a change. As family-owned companies have passed from one

generation to another, traditionally, that has been father to son. That's not true anymore; we have many women on our 14-person board, and that does reflect the fact that women are taking on increasingly important roles.

We support that shift in two key ways: our Women's Leadership Council, which is for executives, and it's focused on how we can bring more women into the leadership of wholesale companies. And also, we have NextGen and the Council for Leadership Development, which really focuses on younger executives—getting them into the room, networking, and helping them get to the next level. We're really proud that the industry is changing for the better, and we still have a long way to go.

CSM: The alcohol industry has recently been subject to challenges resulting from claims about the negative impact of alcohol on health. How is WSWA working to combat these claims and ensure that consumers can receive evidence-based, accurate information?

FC: We want consumers to have access to the best possible science that's out there. We're trying to allow the research that exists to get down to the consumer level, and encouraging government action to be informed by real science. We have been asking that the American Dietary Guidelines be based on a preponderance of the evidence, with a transparent process. As the recent NASEM [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine] report outlines, a glass of wine and responsible consumption can be part of a healthy lifestyle.

The surgeon general's advisory was just that: an advisory. It's the lowest level of rigor that the surgeon general can do. It's not the same as the surgeon general's report on tobacco back in the '60s, which



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Francis Creighton, Michael Mondavi, and Breakthru Beverage Group's Charles Merinoff.

was the result of years of research and a robust, peer-reviewed process. This was essentially a press release with no real review.

The idea that taking a sip of wine each week will give you cancer is just demonstrably not true, and the only way you could come to that position is if you start with that position and squeeze the evidence into it. That's what this neo-prohibitionist movement is doing, and many media outlets are amplifying that messaging. ■

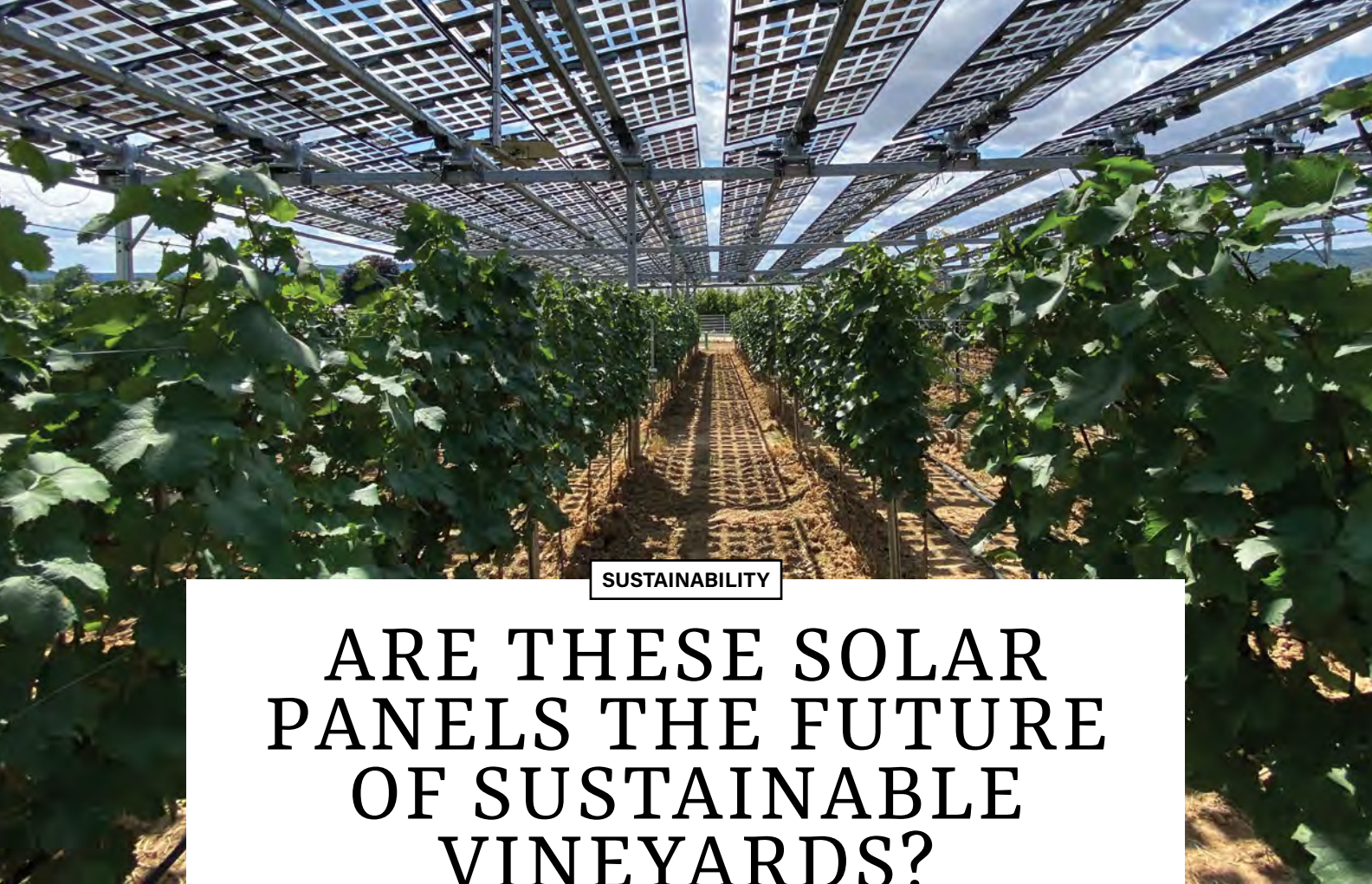
This interview has been edited and condensed.



Members of all tiers of the industry had opportunities to network.



Steve Fette, the manager of artistry and innovation for Allied Beverage Group



SUSTAINABILITY

ARE THESE SOLAR PANELS THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE VINEYARDS?

AGRIVOLTAICS, A NEW SOLAR PANELING SYSTEM DESIGNED TO SUPPORT AGRICULTURE WHILE PROVIDING GREEN ENERGY, HAS SHOWN POSITIVE RESULTS IN VINEYARDS AROUND THE WORLD—BUT ITS HIGH COST AND DEPLETED FEDERAL FUNDING IS SLOWING ITS UPTAKE IN THE U.S.

BY BETSY ANDREWS

On a sunny June day in the Rheingau region of Germany, Manfred Stoll, Ph.D., the head of the Department for General and Organic Viticulture at Hochschule Geisenheim University, stood in the shade of a different sort of canopy than you usually see in vineyards. Three-and-half meters high and made of metal, glass, and photovoltaic cells, it was what Dr. Stoll has dubbed *vitivoltaics*.

That's his term for the viticultural version of agrivoltaics, a technique first proposed in a 1981 research paper by Armin

Zastrow and physicist Adolf Goetzberger, the founder of Germany's Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems. The authors envisioned a solar array positioned on a farm in such a way that it does double duty as an energy source and as a means of enhancing agriculture.

The technology is still in the experimental phase, but across more sites in Europe, Israel, Japan, and the United States, agrivoltaic systems have been proving beneficial to animal husbandry, pollinator gardening, greenhouse cultivation, and crop production—including viticul-

ture—in an era of climate change. While noteworthy results are coming from systems installed in vineyards globally, in the U.S., high costs have deterred winemakers—and their uptake has hit another potential roadblock, with federal funding for environmental innovations like these now under threat.

THE BENEFITS OF VITIVOLTAICS

A third of a hectare, or about three-quarters of an acre in size, Geisenheim's multifunctional system is installed above the vines, the photovoltaic cells embedded in

OPPOSITE PAGE: Vitivoltaic array at work on a vineyard in the Rheingau region of Germany.

clear glass modules that span a horizontal frame held aloft by metal posts. The panels are powered by motors that use an algorithm geared toward the site to rotate and fold them in response to sunlight, heat, rain, and humidity. Installed above one- to three-year-old Riesling vines, which need more moisture and UV protection, the system provides dappled shade.

With climate change stressing plants and pushing them beyond their capacity to hold balanced acidity and sugars, an agrivoltaic array like this offers winemakers the chance to go “back to the future,” says Stoll, to a time when temperatures were more appropriate for the cool-climate grapes. “Under the panels, the temperature is three to four degrees Celsius less, and there’s less radiation, leading to slower ripening. The vines suffer less sunburn, have a lower sugar content, and higher acidity.” The panels help curb evaporation during drought, too, and the soils beneath them retain more moisture. “Outside of the system, the vines are suffering more,” he adds.

Designed for viticulture, the Geisenheim system has all the bells and whistles that an agrivoltaic system in a vineyard might need. Gutters direct rainwater from the top of the panels to locations in the plot that best irrigate the vines. A heating wire woven along the frame switches on automatically to protect the vines from frost if temperatures fall below five degrees Celsius, and a built-in



Manfred Stoll, Ph.D., Hochschule Geisenheim University



González Byass installed agrivoltaic panels on vineyards in drought-prone Toledo.

UVC device uses shortwave radiation, rather than chemicals, to sterilize the vines against downy mildew, which is less of a problem anyway because the vines are shielded from rain. Vineyard vehicles and researcher laptops can even be charged via electric outlets on the system. The vitivoltaics are also portable, so they can be folded like an accordion and put away during high winds or moved to new rows of young vines in the future.

AGRIVOLTAICS IN PRACTICE

While Geisenheim’s specialized viticultural system is still under development, in Europe the most prolific commercial provider is the French company Sun’Agri, which has built 20 arrays in French vineyards, with more in Italy and Israel. In 2018, in response to increasingly unpredictable heat, drought, excessive rain, and summer hailstorms in the Pyrénées-Orientales, growers Pierre and Martine Escudié installed a five-hectare Sun’Agri array at Domaine de Nidolères, planting Grenache Blanc, Chardonnay, and Marselan beneath it. They were comfortable with partially covering vines because “traditionally, farmers planted fruit trees to provide shade for white grape varieties,” explains Martine Escudié.

With an identical control plot right beside it, plus sensors and a weather station collecting real-time data, the Escudiés can measure the system’s effects. “The main benefit we have observed is faster vine growth,” she says, with “slow and optimal

grape maturation” for a better balance between acidity and alcohol, more concentrated fruit aromas, and “an unprecedented range of flavors” in the wines. Hail and frost don’t damage the vines, as during these weather events, the panels can be adjusted to a horizontal position, creating a greenhouse effect beneath them. The vines don’t suffer drought because the ground cover retains more moisture in summer. All of this contributes to 30 percent higher yields.

“We strongly believe in agrivoltaics,” Martine Escudié says. “In fact, we installed a new project in 2024, planting Colombard and Cinsault. We’ll see the first results in three years.”

Larger producers are taking note. In 2023, González Byass partnered with the Spanish utility Iberdola on the Winesolar project at Finca Daramezas in drought-prone Toledo, where the agrivoltaic panels tilt automatically over nine-year-old vines of the indigenous grape variety Airén. “We have multiple plant, soil, and atmosphere sensors measuring several parameters that allow us to make decisions and improve the algorithm,” says González Byass’s agricultural engineer Miguel Tejerina.

Evapotranspiration at the Toledo site has been reduced by 30 percent; the plants beneath the panels require 20 percent less irrigation; and the soil temperature has been reduced by 15 percent on average. “And, obviously, we have produced green and clean energy, reducing our carbon dioxide footprint.”

INNOVATION



Somerset Gourmet Farm replaced rows of vines with solar panels.



Nathanaël Kasriel, Sun'Agri

THE PROMISE OF AGRIVOLTAICS IN THE U.S.

Though he declined to give more details, Sun'Agri research director Nathanaël Kasriel says the company is “in contact with several actors in the U.S. to work on new experiments.” Indeed, the Inspire project, an agrivoltaic research initiative at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, has an online map of more than 600 agrivoltaic projects across the U.S. Yet, although many wineries now use solar power, agrivoltaics are nearly nonexistent in U.S. vineyards.

At Sonoma's Far Niente Winery, where the historic winery building precluded rooftop installation, a solar array covers three-quarters of an irrigation pond, where it “reduces evaporative losses by decreasing airflow over the water and blocking direct solar irradiance,” says retired winemaker Greg Allen, who oversaw the installation in 2008. Though the array is not installed atop vines, the AgriSolar



Far Niente's solar array covers an irrigation pond to reduce evaporation.

Clearinghouse, a nationwide hub developed by the National Center for Appropriate Technology, recognizes the project as agrivoltaic. Far Niente is now going further, exploring “incorporating vertically installed agrivoltaics at select vineyard sites, as certain vineyards feature sun-facing perimeter fencing,” says Allen.

At Somerset Gourmet Farm in Somerset, California, owner David Harde replaced some rows of low-producing Petit Syrah with 43 bifacial panels in 2023. “The agricultural benefits are intermittent shade during the hottest summer days for the ripening grapes,” says Harde, “and the extra shading may help protect against fruit sunburn.” He expects to note the difference in brix and grape quality in this year's harvest.

ROADBLOCKS TO AGROVOLTAICS IN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE

As the Trump administration attempts to defund and depopulate agencies working on clean energy, federal funding for agrivoltaic research projects is in jeopardy. Government assistance is key for small growers because agrivoltaics do not run cheap. In Europe, a typical five-hectare array costs around €3.5 million, says Kasriel, with a return on investment in 15 to 20 years.

Where policies are geared toward increasing clean energy, the cost can be offset by favorable lending practices and government grants. For Harde, the ROI of his system will only take seven years

thanks to offsetting the cost with state and federal tax credits. But the future of federal tax credits for clean energy and sustainable farming is now uncertain. And since grapes are such a high-value crop, Peterson speculates that vineyard owners are risk-averse to the economics of the technology. “Regrettably, there has been limited engagement from the winegrowing industry,” says Tia Hanes, who works in business development at Sunzaun, the provider of Harde's panels.

“I've tried to pursue this with many winemakers, but so far I've not been successful,” laments Majdi Abou Najm, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Land, Air and Water Resources at the University of California at Davis. “Research into agrivoltaics in grapes in California does not exist. Growers here want to see a system work first. So it's a chicken-and-egg situation. At the same time, I am hearing reports from growers that heat is becoming a real problem, so one piece of advice is if you have 10 acres, start experimenting with half an acre. I think this can be transformative.”

As to the Trump regime's attacks on green initiatives like agrivoltaics, Najm says, “Federal funding is just one source, and I hope that the state, philanthropy, and foundations, if they see there is a gap in the funding, will step up and try to compensate for it.” He adds, “I definitely see agrivoltaics as a way forward for the wine industry.” ■