

ANIMALS IN THE VINEYARD

ANOTHER WAY TO SUSTAINABLE VITICULTURE

Weinakademiker Thesis

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Motivation

During my wine travels I have seen many successful integrations of animals in the vineyards and this experience led me to find out more about integrated crop-livestock system in viticulture. There are a lot of concrete articles in magazines, very specific researches focusing on one aspect of integration of animals in the vineyard, or short sections in materials about different viticulture approaches such as biodynamic, organic, regenerative, etc. However, there is a lack of a clear overview, a kind of handbook for winemakers who have no experience with animals in the vineyard but would like to try it. This led me to embark on this research project and write this handbook.

There has also been a greater emphasis on sustainability recently. People are becoming more aware of their connection with nature, and how we can help to preserve it, while also acknowledging the ways in which we are damaging it. However the solutions are sometimes too aggressive or categorical in my point of view. Perhaps a simple combination of traditional practices and modern innovations could be the answer to many of today's problems. Integrating animals in the vineyards represents a significant opportunity for efficient use of land, promoting soil health and animal welfare, which could be used as effective marketing tools and a agritourism attraction for visitors. These are some of the reasons why I believe that working with animals in the vineyard has great potential for the future.

Objective

The primary objective of this thesis is to create a practical handbook that provides a clear overview of the potential benefits and challenges for growers and wineries when considering the use of animals in their vineyards. The handbook should also fill the gap in the literature on the practicality and selection of animals for vineyards with main focus on sheep.

Methodology

The methodology for this study included a comprehensive review of relevant literature and personal interviews with wineries. The literature sources provided historical context, current practices and an overview of research studies. The interviews gave an insight into the practical experiences and current challenges faced by wineries. This mixed-methods approach ensured a complex understanding of the possibilities for incorporating animals into vineyards.

Content

This handbook is divided into 7 sections. The introduction describes how viticulture and livestock production changed rapidly during the 20th century as a result of chemical and technological advances, leading to many positive but also many negative changes. Some of the negatives can be addressed by combining modern innovations with traditional practices, such as integrated crop-livestock production in vineyards.

Chapter 2 gives general reasons for incorporating animals into vineyards and chapters 3-6 are focused on specific animals - sheep, horses, donkeys, geese and chickens. These chapters are discussing their uses in the vineyard, the work they supplement, the amount of labour required to take care about them and other practical considerations. The main focus is on sheep because they are the most common animals found in the vineyards and many winemakers already have experience of sheep grazing in their vineyards through sheep hire or mutually beneficial collaborations between winemakers and sheep farmers. The section also outlines the key factors to consider when purchasing sheep for the vineyard and evaluates different breeds of sheep for their suitability for year-round grazing in vineyards. The two chapters on horses and donkeys explore their historical role in agriculture and transport before they were replaced by tractors and trucks, and focus on the advantages and disadvantages of their comeback in viticulture. Geese and chickens are discussed together in one chapter, focusing on the differences between them, their suitability for vineyards and their additional use for egg and meat production.

The conclusion summarises the pros and cons of integrating animals in vineyards and identifies the need for further research and for producing practical materials to help winemakers with their decisions and provide them with all the necessary information.

Conclusion

The integration of animals into vineyards has several benefits, such as controlling weeds through grazing, providing natural fertiliser, protecting vineyards from pests, positively impacting biodiversity, and improving the well-being of workers. On the other hand caring for the animals can be sometimes challenging, requiring additional work, resources and dedication. However this research has demonstrated that there are many ways how to integrate different animals into vineyards and that the benefits of doing so usually outweigh the potential drawbacks.

There is a great potential for the future to incorporate different animals into the vineyards and the trend in rising number of wineries doing that is a good sign. However more research needs to be done and it would be beneficial if there will be as well more cross collaboration between different agriculture bodies. Another important factor is to inform the winemakers and provide them with clear overview of the options and practical tips, so more handbooks like this would help to support the integration of animals in the vineyards.