

Regenerative Viticulture - future or utopia?

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Abstract of Weinakademiker Diploma Thesis

June 2024

MOTIVATION

In 2023 I had the opportunity to attend the 10th Master of Wine's International Symposium in Wiesbaden, between many others interesting sessions there was one, for me very inspiring, named: "Farming the Future" lead by Justin Howard-Sneyd MW (Trustee of the Regenerative Viticulture Foundation) with panelist: Jamie Goode, Mimi Casteel and Abby Rose, focusing on Regenerative Viticulture. Listening to the principles, practices and results gained by growers following this new sustainable and scientifically based viticultural approach I decided to choose the topic for my Weinakademiker thesis.

OBJECTIVE

In the last years the word "regenerative" has taken the stage in the wine industry, more specifically in combination with viticulture. The aim of this work is to investigate whether regenerative viticulture can be a viable alternative as agricultural approach to address the global crisis that viticulture and wine industry are increasingly facing.

METHODOLOGY

A wide spectrum of literature, white papers, scientific publications, expert and writers published opinions, conferences outcome, podcasts etc has been examined to deeper delve the principles of regenerative viticulture, to analyze the main agricultural practices, related objectives and results achieved.

CONTENT

Introduction

An introductory analysis of global viticulture focused on the major challenges that grape growers for wine production are facing such as:

- Climate change and unpredictable climate conditions leading to yield reduction
- Global warming, early bud break, early grape harvest and consequent changes in grapes composition and quality
- Increasing pressure for environmental friendly agricultural practices and related wines

Definitions

It looks like there is still not a unique and precise definition for Regenerative Viticulture.

This chapter will focus on investigating what Regenerative Viticulture means, its promises and aspirations: definitions, short history, the movement.

Principles

Regenerative viticulture apply an holistic approach based on some founding principles such as:

- The vineyard as agroecosystem, not anymore seen as monoculture
- Biodiversity in the vineyard is a must
- Farming the soil instead of farming grapes, looks to be the motto, intending that the regenerative approach focus on soil health and development to generate better growing condition and resilience.

Practices

As Regenerative Viticulture is intended to be an agronomical approach must be able to offer solutions to the grape growers to finalize their job. The extensive application of conventional viticulture is also due to its ability to give effective solution to practical problems, via seasonal protocols, for example.

Is it Regenerative viticulture able to do the same?

This chapter will deep dive the main agricultural practices applied in the vineyard following the regenerative approach and the results obtained or desired.

Soil management:

- Cover cropping
- Composting
- Biochar
- Mulching
- Weed control

Animals in the vineyard, water management, fungal control, insect control.

Certifications

As happens with organic and biodynamic viticulture also regenerative viticulture offer the possibility of certification, is it a good option for wine producers? Which are the available certification bodies?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion regenerative viticulture represent for sure a new hope in the wine industry worldwide in particular for small and mid size quality focused wineries.

The true question is if this approach will gain the favour of large-scale winemaking industry to positively and substantially impact the whole industry, only time will tell.