



## HOW NAPA WINEMAKERS ARE CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE

JILL COWAN, NOVEMBER 5, 2019



Beth Novak Milliken of Spottswoode wants Napa Valley to become a leader in the fight against climate change.  
Credit...Peter DaSilva for The New York Times



## HOW NAPA WINEMAKERS ARE CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE

JILL COWAN, NOVEMBER 5, 2019

In recent weeks, the Kincadee fire ravaged a part of California that has been hit repeatedly by devastating blazes: Wine Country. It's just one more way the wine industry has been forced to grapple with climate change.

My colleague Eric Asimov, who writes about wine for The Times, recently published a four-part series on how the wine world is adapting. I asked him to write about how the series came about:

Despite the best efforts of this country to ignore the changing climate, its effects have arrived quicker and with more extreme consequences than many had imagined.

Few agricultural products are as sensitive as wine grapes to climate. Wine is cherished for its capability of expressing the nuances each year of the vintage weather conditions, as well as the character of the site in which the grapes are grown. But those prized attributes have made climate change a particular challenge for wine growers.

Since I first wrote in 2003 about how climate change was affecting wine, I've been keeping watch and talking about it to growers and producers around the world. In recent years, between intense heat, fires, drought, floods, frosts and power shutdowns, I don't think any wine region has been as challenged by climate change as Northern California. In the last month, I've written a four-part series on wine and climate change. It began with an overview, followed with a piece examining agricultural practices and then an article on how one large wine producer in Spain has become both a leader in the wine industry's fight against climate change and in adapting to changing conditions. The final piece focused on how one region, Napa Valley, was responding to climate change.

I chose Napa for two reasons: It's the best-known American wine region, and because I have spent a lot of time there discussing climate change over the last few years with some incredibly thoughtful people.

Every step of wine production can expel greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, from the agricultural methods used to tend the vineyard, to how grapes are fermented, how wine is stored and aged, how bottles are manufactured, how wine is shipped and how it's sold.

"I got a note from United Airlines congratulating me for having traveled a million miles," John Williams, proprietor of Frog's Leap Winery in Rutherford, said. "I thought, forget about the farming, maybe I should stop going to New York City to sell wines."

Yet while Napa Valley is full of people who recognize the existential threat of climate change, the willingness to do something about it is less apparent. Changing successful methods can be risky. And it's hard enough making wine this year, much less worrying about a vintage 20 years away.



## HOW NAPA WINEMAKERS ARE CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE

JILL COWAN, NOVEMBER 5, 2019

“We’re not seeing the future because we’re caught up in day-to-day operations,” said Dan Petroski, winemaker at Larkmead in Calistoga. “I just think that people think it’s somebody else’s problem.”

It’s hard not to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the problem. Napa is full of vineyard workers, hotel and restaurant employees, and others who can’t afford to live in the community in which they work. They drive long distances to get there. It’s a problem that can’t be solved at the winery level, and income disparity is not restricted to Napa Valley. These sorts of systemic issues require policy decisions at the highest levels of government.

Is Napa a sustainable fine-wine area in the long term? Some people have suggested that the future of American wine production is at much higher elevations. But the cultural loss would be incalculable.

“It’s not just a question of temperatures,” Mr. Williams said. “It’s soil and history and tradition. We can’t give up on this idea of terroir and how wine speaks to us as a people.”