

Vintage Sustainable Businesses

By John Benson

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1. Introduction

Your author's primary profession is an electrical engineer. My primary industry throughout my career was "energy management systems for electric utilities, commercial and industrial firms" until I retired a bit over a decade ago. Thus, I write about this market and technology frequently. This is one of those posts.

I'm also interested in California Wines. My primary residence is in the Livermore Valley, a major American Viticultural Area (AVA),¹ and at one point I was an amateur wine-maker, and continue to support the California Wine Industry by consuming their product. Also, I own a second home in the low Sierra Nevada Mountains (Arnold, CA) that is on the edge of the Calaveras County wine region.²

About every two weeks I drive from Livermore to Arnold and pass near multiple vineyards and wineries in each wine region. Although this post is not about a winery in either of "my" regions, it is about two other wineries in other regions.

2. Scheid Family Wines

*Off the coast of California, south of Salinas and located at the base of the Santa Lucia Mountains, clusters of high-quality Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes ripen in the cooling fog, warming sun, and perfect soil.*³

Isabelle's Vineyard is just one of several vineyards owned by Scheid Family Wines. In addition to the fog, sun, and soil, all Scheid vineyards benefit from the wind, an extra element that plays a vital role in the company's award-winning wines.

"Wind power. It's extremely windy here. The winds are very dependable. They can sometimes blow 24 hours a day," explained Heidi Scheid, executive vice president of Scheid Family Wines.

For the past eight years, at the Scheid campus, a 400-foot-tall wind turbine has been harnessing the wind. It generates 100% of the power needed to run Scheid's state-of-the-art winery and bottling operations (see Images on the next page).

Scheid is believed to be the largest winery in the world that's powered by renewable energy. "So, it's a lot of power, and the good thing is that our turbine is able to handle all of that power," exclaimed George Zavala, cellar master of winery operations.

"Sustainability has been one of our core values since our family founded this business in 1972," added Scheid.

The company produces 900,000 cases of wine a year, markets 10 global brands, as well as a broad spectrum of private label brands sold at grocery stores across the United States. Scheid Family Wines farms 2,500 acres of vineyards in Monterey County.

¹ <https://www.lvwine.org/> Note that the largest winery in Livermore is Wente, and it also has vineyards in the vineyards in the Arroyo Seco AVA, seen on the next page map south of Greenfield.

² <https://www.calaveraswines.org/wineries>

³ Juliette Goodrich, KPIX CBS SF Bay Area, "California winery harnesses the wind to produce its award-winning wine," ©2025, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/foodanddrink/foodnews/california-winery-harnesses-the-wind-to-produce-its-award-winning-wine/ar-AA1HWjFY?ocid=msdgnntp&pc=U531&cvd=403b25c44a7b488086a92e82955b819b&ei=19>



"We grow quite 36 different varieties," Scheid said. The late Al Scheid founded the company more than 50 years ago as a grape grower. His daughter explained how he was "green" from the get-go. "It was just always important to him. Sustainability. From the very beginning," she noted.

Inside the huge Scheid facility at Greenfield, Zavala took CBS News Bay Area on a tour. He said the electricity provided by the wind turbine is critical for their vintages, as he pointed to a large contraption.

"We're filtering our chardonnay right now, and this will be bottled in the next two days," explained Zavala.

The company is an award-winning and California-certified sustainable winery and vineyard. Skylights naturally light up the facility, and automatic light sensors turn electric lights on and off as needed. The wine tanks are equipped with insulating jackets.

A significant acreage is certified as organic under strict California standards. High-tech sensors deliver just enough water to each vine and not a drop more.

Two hundred and fifty owl boxes are located throughout the vineyards. Owls, and not pesticides, take care of any rodents that run around the vineyards, gnawing on the valuable vines.

Even the bottles use less glass, making them lighter and cheaper to transport.

"Having a lighter weight bottle and one that has less environmental impact is really great from start to finish," Scheid said.

According to the company's calculations, the clean energy generated by the wind turbine is the equivalent of taking almost 4,500 gas-guzzling cars off the road for an entire year.

The turbine generates so much electricity that the excess amount also powers 234 local homes.

"We're really only using half of what we need to power it," explained Scheid. "The rest of the wind power generated actually goes back onto the grid."

A toast to Scheid, where the winds of change bear significant fruit.

Author's comment: Since the map on the previous page showed four regions, I spent quite a bit of time researching this. The bottom-line is that I could not find a consistent definition of wine climatic regions for California anywhere. The most common sites that mentioned these regions had three regions, but their definition was not consistent. I believe there are too many climate / weather variables from one region to another for consistent classifications.

The named "AVA" regions on this map are "American Viticultural Areas," and you see several of these. These are designated/named areas in California that produce (more or less) similar wines (my primary residence is in the Livermore Valley AVA, see page 1). Although each AVA has similar weather, it can still vary significantly across the AVA. Also, many other factors have more influence on wines than whether they are in the same AVA, such as grape varietal, vineyard methods and wine-making methods.

3. Napa Valley's Frank Family Vineyards

Coming back to the SF Bay Area, I found another family Vineyard and Winery that is powering their facilities with renewable energy.

Frank Family Vineyards, a part of the Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) family of brands, has announced the installation of more than 800 solar panels on its property, enabling Frank Family to generate at least 75% of the winery's electricity needs, including powering the winery, tasting room, and new hospitality space, The Miller House. Through a combination of on-site solar and purchased renewable energy, Frank Family Vineyards is powered by 100% renewable electricity.⁴

The shift to renewable energy at Frank Family Vineyards contributes to TWE's global commitment to sustainability, with the company setting ambitious goals for... net-zero carbon-emissions by 2030. Frank Family took the initial step toward these goals in 2022 when it became the first of Treasury Wine Estates Napa wineries to enroll in Marin Clean Energy's (MCE) Deep Green Program, allowing the winery to source 100% renewable energy from local wind and solar power.



Frank Family Vineyards Solar Array - Photo Courtesy of Frank Family Vineyards

With its recent solar array installation, Frank Family Vineyards is shifting from purchasing clean energy and supporting the renewables market to generating 75% of its own, adding more carbon-free power to the grid. The remaining 25% of Frank Family's energy needs will continue to be met through its partnership with MCE Deep Green.

"Sustainability is a key part of our winemaking philosophy at Frank Family Vineyards, and we're thrilled to start generating our own energy," says Senior Winemaker and General Manager Todd Graff. "We're always seeking new ways to minimize our carbon-footprint and carefully consider the impact every winemaking and business practice has on the land we care for and the community around us. This investment is another milestone in our sustainability efforts, and we are proud to say 2024 will be our first vintage powered by the sun!"

⁴ <https://wineindustryadvisor.com/2024/09/17/napa-valleys-frank-family-vineyards-flips-the-switch-to-solar>

The new solar array will generate over 573,000 kilowatt-hours of energy annually, the equivalent of the average annual electricity usage of 53 houses.

“At Treasury Wine Estates (TWE), sustainability is a way of life and has been ingrained in our business since the beginning. We are so proud of the team at Frank Family Vineyards for their tireless efforts in transitioning to renewable electricity and switching on solar today,” said Rachel Ashley, Senior Vice President of Supply at Treasury Americas, a division of TWE. “As an agricultural company at our core, we must recognize the impact of climate change and create sustainable solutions to ensure the wines we love today are here to stay for the next generation. Frank Family Vineyard’s solar switch on today is an important step in TWE’s goal of transitioning to 100% renewable electricity across our global operations by the end of this year.”

Frank Family’s solar array installation is the latest in the winery’s “Green to our Roots” philosophy. For Frank Family, being green involves earth-to-bottle stewardship, including protecting and restoring the Napa River watershed, saving energy and water, reducing waste and carbon-footprint, and being conscientious employers and good neighbors. The winery maintains sustainability certifications across 100% of its owned and leased vineyards. TWE was recently recognized for its excellence in sustainability and was awarded the California Green Medal Leader Award in 2023 for its leadership across the full spectrum of sustainability—environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability. Additionally, Treasury Wine Estates was named Sustainable Business of the Year by the Napa Chamber of Commerce in 2023.

This year, as part of Frank Family’s annual giving campaign “Frank for a Cause”, the winery has partnered with 4ocean to support its mission to combat the ocean plastic crisis. Through July 2025, every purchase of Frank Family wine will pull one pound of plastic and trash from the world’s oceans, rivers and coastlines. For more information about Frank Family’s partnership with 4ocean, please visit www.frankfamilyvineyards.com/philanthropy/4ocean .

About Frank Family Vineyards

Frank Family Vineyards has been a part of Napa Valley’s landscape for three decades. Founded by former Disney Studios President Rich Frank, along with his wife, Leslie, an Emmy Award-winning former broadcast news journalist, the winery is dedicated to crafting exceptional wines with balance and memorable guest experiences. Frank Family Vineyards became part of the Treasury Wine Estates family of wines in 2021. Consistently recognized as having one of the best tasting rooms in Napa Valley, Frank Family is considered one of today’s most successful California wineries. The winery proudly stewards 380 acres of sustainably farmed, coveted vineyards spanning five estate properties, including the iconic Winston Hill Vineyard in Rutherford. While best known for its classic renditions of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, the world-class portfolio also includes méthode champenoise sparkling wines, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and more.