# Sokol Blosser Winery | 2007 Sustainability Report

*By Alison Sokol Blosser, Co-President*

## I. INTRODUCTION

My mother, Susan, has written our annual sustainability report since 2003, chronicling the successes and failures Sokol Blosser has experienced in our drive toward sustainability across the operation. She retired officially on January 2, 2008 and now the torch has been passed to my brother, Alex, and me. Our goal with our sustainability report is to sum up, for our employees, our customers, and our Board of Directors, our successes, setbacks, future plans, and the challenges we have faced in fulfilling our sustainability goals. Each report deals only with that particular year. Our sustainability reports from prior years are on our website: sokolblosser.com, and here is a short list of our successes prior to 2007:

- Organic certification for our vineyard
- U.S. Green Building Council LEED certified barrel cellar (first winery in world to achieve this)
- Renewable wind power – 1/3 of our power usage
- 25kW solar panel system – 1/3 of our power usage
- Winery waste from harvest (grape skins and stems) recycled into compost piles, which is then used to improve vineyard soil
- 50% biodiesel in vineyard tractors and trucks
- Member of the Prescott Western Bluebird Recovery Project with about 15 birdhouses
- Brochures and copy paper now 100% post consumer waste recycled content
- Eliminated foil capsules, printed wine labels on recycled paper, and put finished wine into kraft cases
- Active in the Oregon Natural Step Network (Susan is on the board)

## II. SUSTAINABILITY AT SOKOL BLOSSER WINERY IN 2007

Reversing the damage we have inflicted on our planet will take a global effort, by all nations and all peoples. We are not under any illusion that what we do at Sokol Blosser will have much effect. But while we are not optimistic, we have hope that if each of us does our part, our many small acts will add up to make a difference.

But even taking small acts is not easy, and this year, as in the past, we look back on a series of frustrations,

setbacks, and a few victories. The following report is divided into continuing issues, frustrations and setbacks, and successes. This report focuses on one year, 2007. For previous year's reports, 2003-2006, see our website, sokolblosser.com.

## III. CONTINUING ISSUES

**CORK:** Many wineries have stopped using cork, the traditional wine bottle closure, and gone to either plastic corks or screw caps. Plastic has no appeal for us because it is not recyclable at the consumer level and we don't like plastic anyway as a petroleum-based product. Research on screw caps indicates that they do a good job of keeping the wine sound. But screw caps are metal (a mined, non-renewable material) and have a plastic liner.

Even with the likelihood that cork taint will ruin 5-10% of our wine bottles, we still are using natural cork. This year, some cork companies came out with FSC-certified cork. We've used FSC-certified lumber for construction projects and were eager to get the FSC-certified cork as a way to lessen our impact on the Earth. However, we could not justify the 40% upcharge. More manufacturers are getting FSC-certified, so our hope is that the upcharge will be less next year.

**CARBON NEUTRAL:** We've long thought about what it would take and how we could go about becoming carbon neutral. In 2007, Oregon's Governor Kulongski created the "Carbon Neutral Challenge Initiative" to assess and reduce the business's carbon footprint, with the ultimate goal of becoming carbon neutral. We signed up for this challenge and are waiting for help to begin the audit.

## IV. FRUSTRATIONS AND SETBACKS

**VINE REMOVAL:** We removed several acres of old vines, the last of our phylloxerated self-rooted vines. Once we had pulled out all the vines and made two giant 15ft piles, we debated how best to get rid of them. In the past, we've burned them. This year, we decided to go the more sustainable route – or so we thought – and purchased a wood chipper. We asked our vineyard crew to put each vine through the chipper, collect the chips, and then spread them in the tractor roads through the vineyard to give added traction during the winter. We quickly saw how extremely labor-intensive and inefficient this method was, and the chipping didn't even work that well. Our vineyard crew spent a few days chipping the vines and made little headway through one pile. Ultimately, we asked them to stop, returned the chipper for a credit, and resorted to burning the pile.

**LAND CLEARING:** We purchased 20 acres of land; it was our first land purchase in nearly 30 years. The land was covered in thick, over-grown blackberries that had the run of the place for ten-plus years. We also underestimated the number of trees that would need to be cleared as well. We thought clearing would be quick and easy and that soon we'd be laying out 13 acres of new Pinot Noir vines. Boy, were we wrong!

Our first obstacle was the blackberries. We called several organic chemical providers and after they all told us that the organic product wouldn't work and not to even try it, we resorted to using Roundup and Garlan. Since the land was nearby but clearly separated from our organic-certified estate vineyard, we were ok in terms of not harming our existing organic certification.

The second obstacle was the trees. We originally estimated there were 40 trees to remove, and once we got into it, we actually ended up removing closer to 130 trees. For tree-huggers like us, it was disheartening. Many were small trees, less than a foot in diameter, but we were still disappointed. There were a few large, beautiful Oregon oak trees that we tried to salvage by contacting a local barrel maker to see if they'd like to take the oak and make it into barrels for us. We soon learned it would cost far more to go that route than to pay the exorbitantly high price of more than $900/barrel for the top of the line French oak barrels that we routinely purchase. We ended up paying to have the trees felled, and then giving them to someone who removed them for free and sold them off as firewood.

On the bright side, we're getting ready to plant 13.3 acres of Pinot Noir vines in spring 2008 on the new land. We also started the organic certification process on the new land in August 2007 (after we were done getting rid of the blackberries). And, we contacted the USDA to work on a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) because we'd like to restore the 6 acres of riparian land along Miller Creek. Hope for the land is not lost.

**LABEL SETBACK:** We thought we had finally put our labels on a sustainable footing but our label printer couldn't get us recycled paper on a recyclable liner in time for our bottling in the spring. The problem seems to be too little demand for this environmental paper, so a long lead-time is needed and the printer didn't order the paper in time. They apologized profusely and we ended up with half of our labels being printed on 30% post-consumer recycled content paper on a non-recyclable liner and the other half were printed on virgin stock on a recyclable liner. However, for our 2008 bottling run, we will be using 100% post-consumer recycled content paper on a non-recyclable liner, which we will capture and send back to the printer to be re-used.

## V. SUCCESSES

**BIODIESEL:** We purchased our first new vineyard truck in more than ten years: a diesel GMC full-size truck. We're putting a 50% biodiesel blend in it, and it's running very well. Although it cost more and we ended up with a bit more truck that we probably needed, we're pleased that we're able to run all of our farm vehicles on biodiesel.

**SOLAR PANELS:** We installed a 25 kW solar panel system below what used to be our concert amphitheater, at the top end of a vineyard block in December 2006. It went live on January 7, 2007 and immediately we saw the meter roll backwards. Anyone can visit our website (http://www.sokolblosser.com/vineyard/good_to_the_earth.html) and see in real-time how much electricity our panels are generating. We are generating enough energy to cover one third of our needs.

**RECYCLING IN OFFICES:** We made recycling in the offices and Tasting Room easier. Every desk has simply a white paper recycling bin. Clusters of desks share one waste bin and soft plastic recycling bin. Outside in our covered breezeway, we have a row of big blue recycling bins set up for glass, aluminum, plastic water bottles, soft plastic, and hard plastic. We're continuing, of course, to also recycle cardboard.

**STAFF INVOLVEMENT:** In December, we started having "Green Bag Lunches" to gather our staff in

an informal setting to brainstorm ways to be more sustainable. Already, we're starting to see the fruits of our labor. Two people started carpooling from Beaverton, saving 40 miles in commuting mileage a day. We set up a separate "reused paper" printer. We're emailing out some invoices to customers rather than mailing or faxing them to save paper. These are all ideas our staff offered up, and we're eager to implement as many more of these great eco-friendly ideas as possible.

**COLLATERAL:** In 2007, a few of our local printers became FSC-certified. We were thrilled to be able to work with them to produce our most important company collateral on FSC-certified paper. Our first foray was our Holiday Catalog (17,000 copies!), which we printed on FSC-certified paper. The rest of our printing was done with 100% recycled content, 20-100% post-consumer waste paper. We also discovered greenerprinter.com and started using them to produce postcards. They use 100% recycled content, 50% post-consumer waste, process chlorine-free paper.

**REMODEL/EXPANSION:** We remodeled our existing offices, doubled the size of our office space, and created a private "Garden Room" where we can gather for lunch and hold private events. While we did not go for LEED certification on this project, we did everything possible to make the project as eco-friendly as possible.

**Materials**

- FSC-certified framing materials.
- Re-used framing materials to build new deck; bought FSC-certified Cedar for floor boards and railing.
- FSC-certified maple cabinet doors and trim (maple provided by The Joinery, Portland, OR) formaldehyde-free MDF cabinet bodies and shelving.
- Countertops manufactured by EnviroGLAS are made from 100% recycled glass and porcelain terrazzo in Garland, TX.
- Formaldehyde-free MDF boards used for painted wood caps and trim.
- Marmoleum flooring, which is a nature-friendly and long-lasting material. It's produced from renewable materials: linseed oil, rosins, wood flour, jute and ecologically responsible pigments. The harvesting or extraction of these raw materials consumes relatively little energy.
- Low-e Milgard windows (locally manufactured) wood-clad windows.
- Miller 'Acro Pure' low odor, zero voc, interior acrylic latex finish was used throughout the project interior. Rodda 'Horizon' was used on the building exterior. Water based stains and polyurethanes were used on exposed wood surfaces throughout.
- Dual-flush toilet in bathroom reduces potable water usage by over 30%.
- Pervious concrete on walkway to Tasting Room and pad underneath the breezeway allows water to quickly drain through.

**Energy Efficiency**

- Large windows allow for lots of natural light and lessen dependence on using lights.
- 2-zone programmable thermostats allow for careful temperature controlling in upstairs and downstairs; separate energy efficient supplemental cooling unit in server room uses environmentally friendly R410A refrigerant and means that the small server room area is always cooled while the rest of the building may not be. High efficiency air handler uses R410A refrigerant and features high

efficiency blower motor and evaporator coils. Heat Pump is 'Energy Star' rated and meets or exceeds 13.00 SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio).

- Compact fluorescent light bulbs in all fixtures.
- Energy efficient suspended direct-indirect light fixtures.
- Installed high efficiency 'Energy Saver' water heater with non-CFC foam insulation.

**Furnishings**

- Reused all old Herman Miller modular office furniture
- Added Herman Miller modular furniture systems
- Action Office Furniture is made from 24% recycled materials (6% post-consumer content). The panels have particle board stile and rail frames made from SFI-certified wood. Hard-surfaced panels are covered with FSC-certified sustainably harvested hardboard. Work surfaces are composed primarily of sawdust generated from other wood processing operations; work surface substrates are made from over 87% post-consumer recycled wood content. Steel components contain approximately 25% recycled content. It is also GREENGUARD™ certified as a low-emitting product that meets current indoor air quality standards. At the end of its useful life, it is 25% recyclable.
- Meridian filing and storage systems are made from 25% recycled materials (21% post-consumer content). The metal components are powder-coated, which eliminates solvents and VOCs from the finishing process. The recycled Ironstone finish used in drawer interiors is composed of up to 50 percent recycled powder-coat paint. It is also GREENGUARD™ certified as a low-emitting product that meets current indoor air quality standards. At the end of its useful life, it is 100% recyclable.
- Mirra office chairs are made from 42% recycled materials (31% post-consumer content). It's manufactured in West Michigan on a production line that utilizes 100% green power (50% from wind turbines and 50% from captured landfill off-gassing). No air or water emissions are released during its production. It is also GREENGUARD™ certified as a low-emitting product that meets current indoor air quality standards. At the end of its useful life, it is 96% recyclable. Plastic components are even identified with an ASTM recycling code to aid in recycling the components.
- Hunter Douglas window blinds are PVC-free with no VOC's which eliminates off-gassing. The material is also completely recyclable.

**PRODUCTION EQUIPMENT:** We decided 2007 was the year in which we would purchase a very expensive filtering system to filter our white wines to stop fermentation and before bottling. We tried out four models and ultimately selected one made in France. (There wasn't an option of buying one made locally, unfortunately.) In the past, we had to filter our wine twice: once through the DE filter (diatomaceous earth) and once through a plate and frame filter. This is an extremely common practice among wineries. DE is actually the skeletal remains of tiny organisms. It's a mined substance and a potential carcinogen; our staff had to wear masks and use extreme care when handling the fine powdery substance. The plate and frame filter used disposable pads that were a cellulose/DE mix. Both filtering methods were necessary to do for each wine. They're messy and time consuming, and disposing of the DE was always difficult because it's a hazardous material. The new cross-flow filter system that we bought is an enormous contraption that has numerous quality and environmental benefits. It saves us time and can run unattended throughout the night. We lose less wine during the filtration process. There are no disposable pads or materials needed. And, it avoids using DE. In addition to the large price tag, the only other potential drawback to the system, which seems quite minor compared to all the advantages, is that

we have to use some chemicals to clean the system after each wine is filtered.

We also purchased a second electric forklift. The old propane-powered forklift that we've used for 20-odd years was finally retired from day-to-day use. It will only be used sparingly during peak periods of harvest.

**SURFACE CLEANERS USED IN THE TASTING ROOM:** We tried a number of different cleaners for the tasting room floors, bathrooms and offices trying to find a product that could be used once a week to clean thoroughly the mess left by heavy traffic, not leave a odor in the space, and have the smallest environmental impact.

Simple Green All Purpose Cleaner is one of the most recognized and longest standing "green" cleaners on the market. It did a great job cleaning the floors and a good job on the bathrooms. It also comes highly concentrated so that little packaging is needed and takes up less storage space. The downside is the strong odor that it leaves behind. We would have to allow too much time everyday for the space to air out and even after 12 hours you could still detect its very distinct smell.

Bio Kleen Super Concentrated All Purpose Cleaner is the most concentrated of the products we tested and went a long way but lacked the cleaning power. We tried it in different proportions but even at double the recommended amount it still did not do the job well enough for highly trafficked areas. The Bac-Out Stain and Odor Eliminator from Bio Kleen was tried in the restrooms thinking that its combination of natural enzymes and lime peel extract would do a better job but we experienced the same results. Not enough cleaning power.

Clorox Green Works All Purpose Cleaner is a coconut based cleaning agent with corn based ethanol and essential lemon oil. While not as concentrated as the others it combines tough cleaning power without the heavy scent. We have found that this product is a compromise of the previous two and works on the bathrooms and floors and is 99.9% all natural.

**CONTINUING EDUCATION:** On January 26th, Derek Smith, former Director of Sustainability at Norm Thompson Outfitters, presented "Global Warming 101" to our whole staff. We also sent nine employees to the day-long Natural Step training, and three employees attended the big Natural Step conference on the NIKE campus.

**AWARDS:** We received quite a bit of recognition for our efforts to be more sustainable during 2007. It was entirely unexpected yet extraordinarily fulfilling to have others recognize the struggles and triumphs we've faced.

- In April, the City of Portland's Office of Sustainable Development awarded Sokol Blosser a "BEST Practices for Sustainability" in a small business award, which is presented annually to Portland area companies demonstrating excellence in business practices that promote economic growth and environmental benefits.
- In June, the State of Oregon made Sokol Blosser a Finalist in its Sustainability awards.
- Susan Sokol Blosser was awarded Sunset Magazine's prestigious "Green Award." The honor was

announced in the September 2007 issue of Sunset, the leading lifestyle publication in the West with 1.4 million subscribers. The editors noted that "president and founder Susan Sokol Blosser has pioneered green winegrowing and making in a state that is itself in front of the movement in the industry."

## V. ISSUES FOR 2008

**CONTINUING EDUCATION:** Staff education is a top priority. We will continue to send our employees to the day-long Natural Step training and other sustainability seminars throughout the year.

**ORGANIC LABELING:** Our estate vineyards have been certified organic since 2005. We bottled our 2005 vintage without putting any notation on them regarding our organic status. We decided that the 2006 Pinot Noirs and 2007 white wines will have such notation and are working on those changes for our 2008 bottling run.

**SUSTAINABLE GRAPE SOURCES:** How do we source more sustainably-farmed fruit? Especially for our blended wines, Evolution and Meditrina, where much of the fruits comes from WA and CA where they don't have LIVE certification, Oregon's sustainable certification for vineyards. WA has VINEA, which his similar to LIVE. CA doesn't have anything. How can we work with our growers and suppliers to help them achieve a sustainable farming certification? This will be something we start to tackle in 2008 and will likely take us many years to achieve.

**SUSTAINABLE OUTDOOR LIGHTING:** This continues to be a problem, and we hope to resolve it in 2008. Lighting after dark for customers and employees is a serious issue. We don't have enough and what we have is not energy efficient.

**CARBON NEUTRAL:** We've joined the Governor's pledge to go carbon neutral. How do we determine our carbon footprint? Once we know that, we can look at ways to minimize our carbon footprint and purchase offsets for the difference.

**WASTE:** How can we minimize the amount of materials we throw away? And how can we encourage our customers to do the same?

**SUPPLIERS:** We continue to look for like-minded companies with which to do business.