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The 360° approach of sustainability in viticulture What makes viticulture sustainable? It's bigger, broader, and these advocates

say, better concept than organics. Gwendolyn Elliott speaks with wine industry advocates about their regional sustainability certifications that go beyond farming practices. Gwendolyn Elliott







various meanings. For wine-growing regions seeking to demonstrate a commitment to responsible land stewardship, one major challenge is defining what, exactly,

'sustainability' means in viticulture.

In the United States and Canada, no uniform charter or official or federally recognised standard for **sustainable viticulture** exists. As with most regulations and designations in North American wine, there is a network of state or region-specific guidelines developed for local conditions, each with its own

varying set of acceptable standards and practices. Most are formed out of interest from local wine-growers, supported by agricultural research and science, and are certified by third-party auditing.

What winemakers and growers passionate about sustainable viticulture uniformly share

is a similar ethos. Most say sustainable wine certifications build on existing programmes

already certifying organic, biodynamic, regenerative, salmon-safe, natural and other 'eco-friendly' wines with a more holistic approach to wine-growing and the wine business itself. They also offer examples of other benefits, such as increased transparency of grape and wine quality and the opportunity to connect with others in the wine community to share information in the face of climate change and an increasingly hard-to-predict growing

Prioritising people Marissa Dineen, owner and vintner of Dineen Vineyards in the Rattlesnake Hills American Viticultural Area (AVA) of **Washington State**, offers her definition. 'I always start with: sustainability is broader,' Dineen says. Her family estate vineyards were some of the first to be certified sustainable under the state's new viticulture

programme, Sustainable WA, launched in 2022.

sustainability framework.'

season.

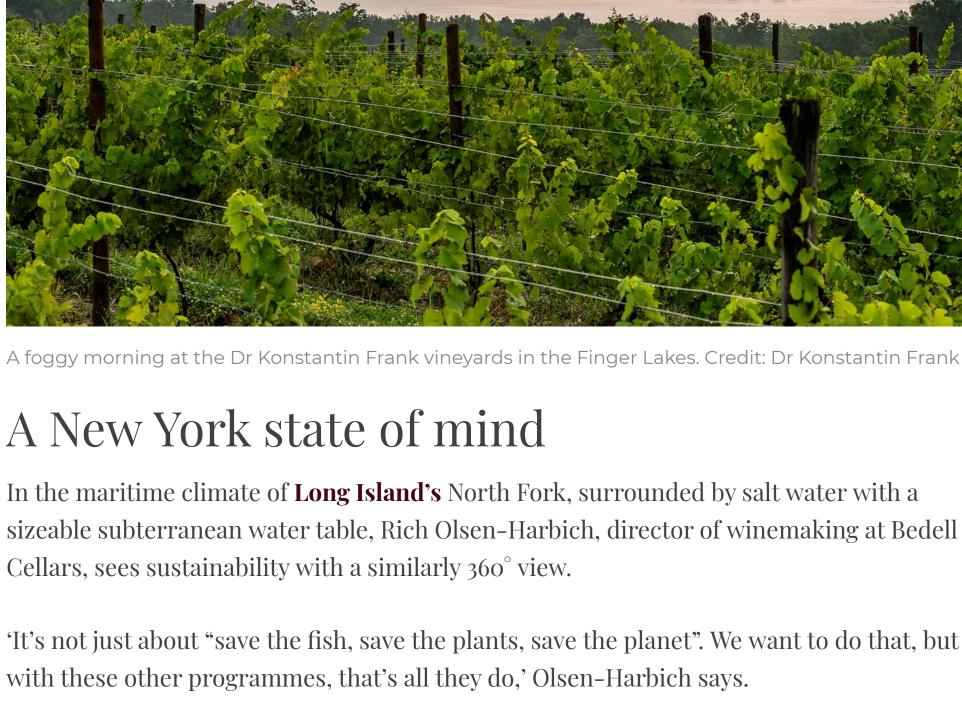
'Not only does [sustainability] consider your farming practices, which is really what organic and biodynamic do, but it also considers the people, HR and social justice aspect. And the proper business management, which we refer to as "prosperity" in the

Dineen's 40ha (100 acres), planted chiefly to Bordeaux and Rhône varietals, are all harvested by hand. Grape and wine quality would suffer without a skilled crew offered benefits and healthcare, job training and professional development, and other resources - all defined as part of the **Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard**.

'We have long-term employees whom we look after because winemakers want to know

that when their grapes get harvested, they're being handled nicely and cared for. If you're

not looking after your employees, they come and go really fast.'



Olsen-Harbich is a long-tenured vintner who authored the petition for The North Fork of Long Island AVA in 1986 and also helped develop the first sustainability certification for

his appellation, Long Island Sustainable Winegrowing (LISW), in 2012.

Olsen-Harbich says it's essential to understand the science of viticulture, soil health, the local ecosystem and the long-term viability of the wine business to incorporate winegrowing practices that are sustainable in the long term.

use when it comes to managing certain aspects in the vineyard. 'Copper sulphate and copper hydroxide are materials that can be used to control mildew.

They are organically certified. However, they have a very long half-life of a few hundred

years or more, so they can build up in the soil over time and become toxic to soil

microflora and fauna, marine life and birds,' Olsen-Harbich says.

on the pesticides you use, it's better for the environment.'

Malivoire on the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario, Canada.

sustainable wine growing's big hurdles.

Developing buy-in

happened for the growers,' Mottiar says.

decimated [the vineyards].'

talk about things.'

Copper, for example, which is certified organic, isn't necessarily the safest material to

In these types of cases, certain pesticides are permitted in sustainable viticulture. Justin Jackson, programme manager for New York Sustainable Winegrowing, the

statewide certification that started in 2023 and works in partnership with LISW, says

methods. 'Pesticides are a fundamental aspect of agriculture. Organic uses pesticides, biodynamic uses pesticides, and sustainable uses pesticides. No one wants to spray, but everyone

kind of has to if you want to be economically sustainable. Frankly, sometimes, depending

pesticides are typical across all sectors of viticulture – even the most 'natural' sounding

'Organic really only encompasses what you're putting into the vineyard. It doesn't cover any sort of agricultural practices beyond that when it comes to the soil, or disease prevention by canopy management, it doesn't encroach on anything economic. It doesn't even delve into social equity.' The prevailing understanding of 'organic' viticulture, for better or worse, is another of

'Farmers in general kind of don't like to be told what to do,' says Mottiar, a committee member of **Sustainable Winegrowing Ontario** and a wine grower himself.

'Once they understood that [the certification] is a lot of best management practices and

abiding by all the environmental and government rules [such as using locally grown

grapes, a stipulation of the regional wine governing authority, the Vintners Quality

Alliance (VQA)], but not about "being organic" then I think that's when a lot of buy-in

'I think there was hesitation that sustainable meant organic, and while a lot of growers

are environmentally conscious, they don't want to take the risk that they could lose their

crop in any season just to become sustainable,' says Shiraz Mottiar, general manager of

Nearby, Andrea Kaiser – daughter of Inniskillin co-founder Karl J Kaiser – carries on her father's winemaking legacy with her small production winery, Drea's Wine Co. She's benefitted from her father's relationships with growers and other pillars of the wine

community, and as chair of the Sustainable Winegrowing Ontario committee, she

Beyond the environment, 'which everybody thinks of,' she says, 'it's also about the

economics, which I define as buying local, and buying products in your own backyard.

And then the community part, that you're integrated with a community and being a good

emphasises the community aspect of sustainable wine-growing.

neighbour with your farm next door.' Future proofing our viticulture Meaghan Frank, DIP WSET, vice-president, and fourth generation of her family's winery,

Dr Konstantin Frank in New York's Finger Lakes, has found the community aspect of New York's sustainability certification valuable, too. 'Two years ago, we had a spring frost, which in our 65 years of being here, we've never

seen, ever. Nobody was prepared. Then four years ago, a hailstorm came through and

challenges, and set everybody up for the future. It also gives us all a space to be together.

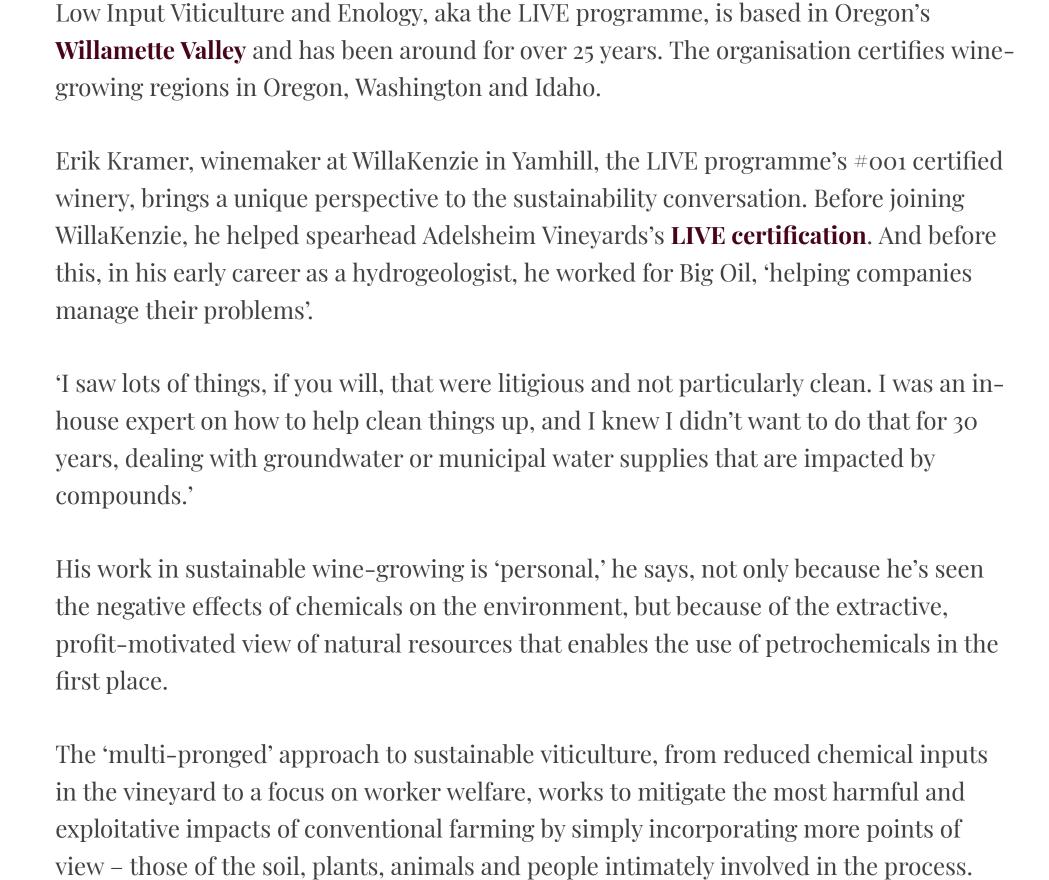
connect, which is becoming harder. It's giving us a reason to all get in the same room and

These certification meetings and these community-building events give us a space to

'I think this certification is helping us to be agile and nimble, anticipate future

'LIVE from Oregon'

WillaKenzie's Erik Kramer. Credit: Carolyn Wells Kramer



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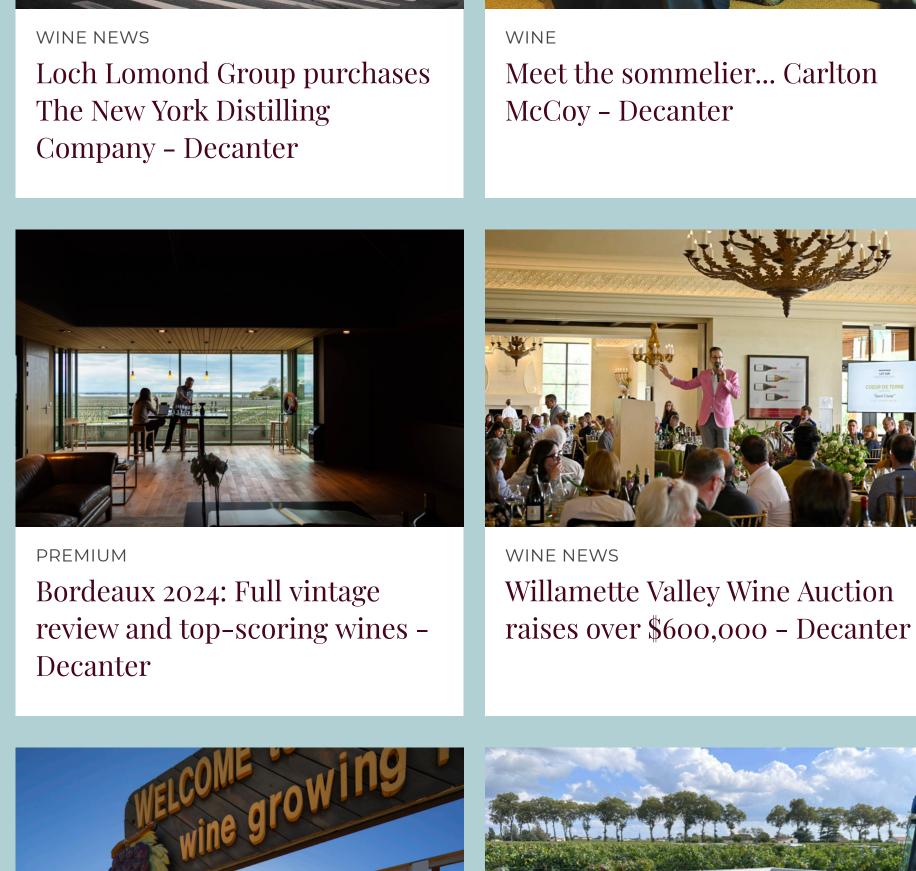
opinion, can and should be a multigenerational thing. Every year, you're removing,

taking things out, whether that's how you're working with the soil or plant material.

what we take away. It's a long-range play, but it's the right thing to do.'

'And if we want to be able to farm for a longer period of time, then we need to put back

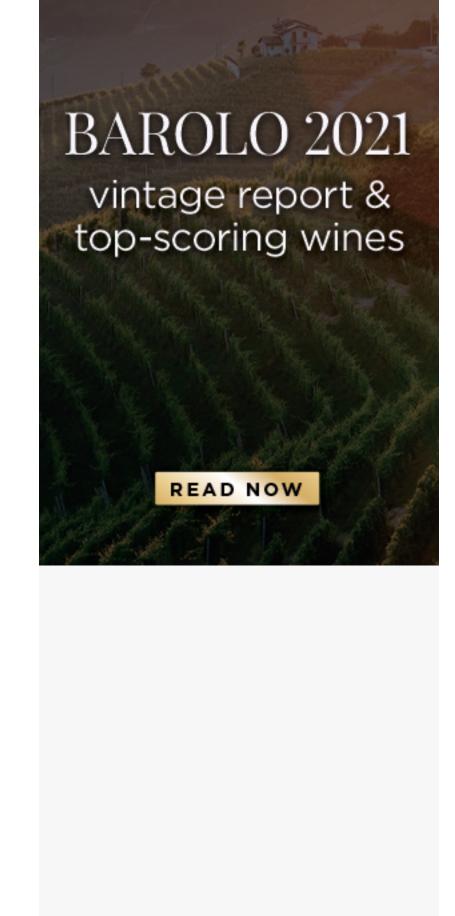
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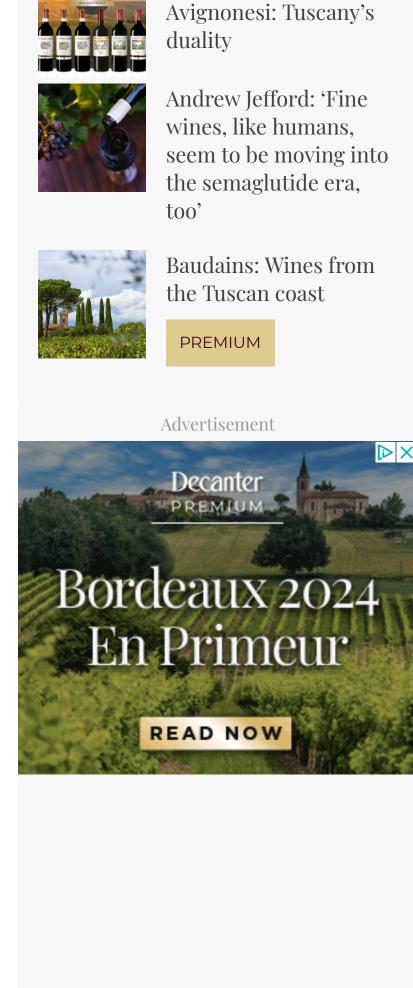




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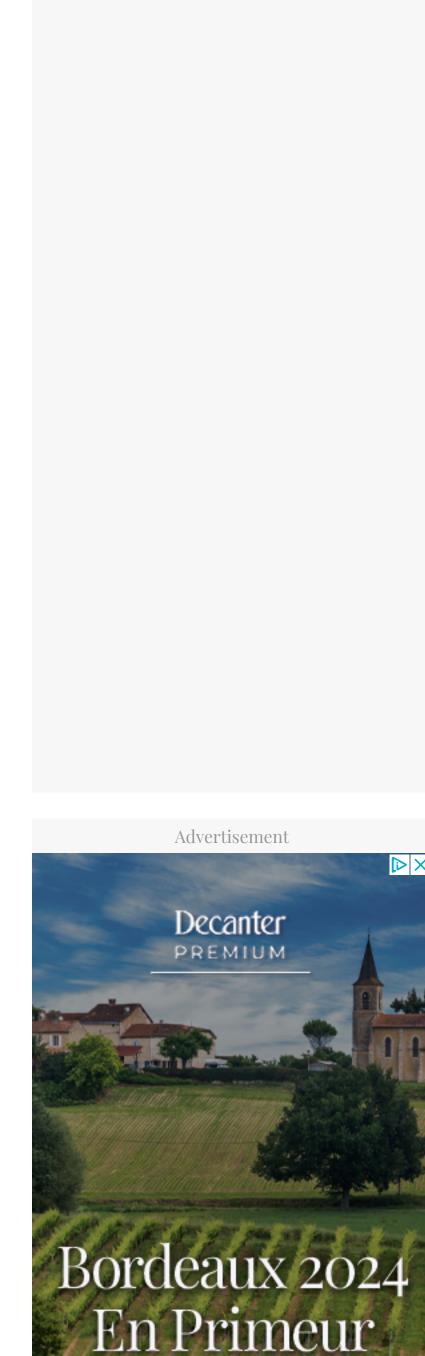
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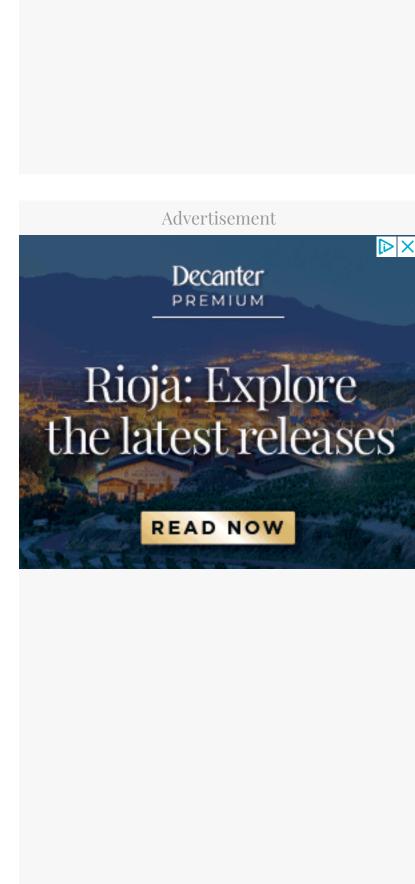
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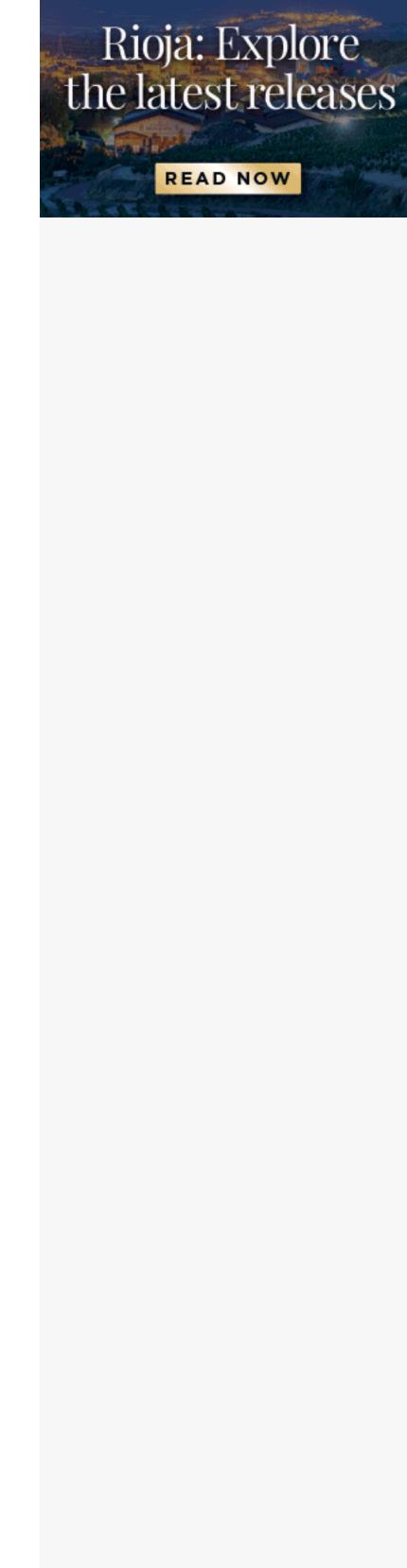
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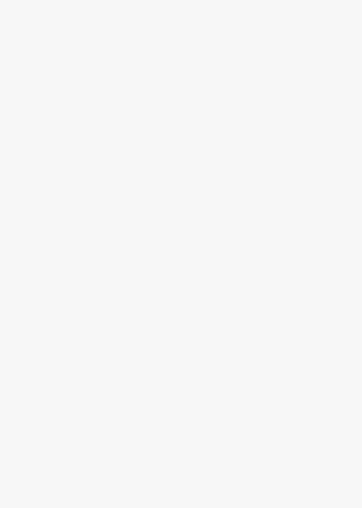
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