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## Forming a Global Sustainable Wine Roundtable

*Introducing a new collaborative initiative, open to all in the wine industry*

Through our website, podcasts and conferences, Sustainable Wine Ltd has become an international gathering place for the wine community. From scores of interviews with leading wine experts, we've heard two common requests: (1) a broader platform on which to share information about sustainability issues in wine and (2) global agreement on the definition of sustainable wine. These requests were resoundingly amplified by the speakers and participants in our recent Future of Wine Forum. A group of volunteers representing all aspects of wine production and marketing has begun to explore the potential of a global roundtable and sustainability standard. We welcome input and support.

*-Toby Webb and Agatha Pereira, Sustainable Wine founders*

**Introduction:** An independent, multi-stakeholder roundtable would rally the wine community around a common vision for sustainability and serve as a center for communication and learning. It would provide a framework for agreeing on sustainability standards and sharing best practices in all aspects of viticulture, wine making and wine business. It would serve as a technical resource, policy shop/sounding board, knowledge center and database. An independent, inclusive, voluntary roundtable will/would support and seek to actively coordinate and collaborate with individual company or regional initiatives.

### **The benefits of a global, sector-wide roundtable:**

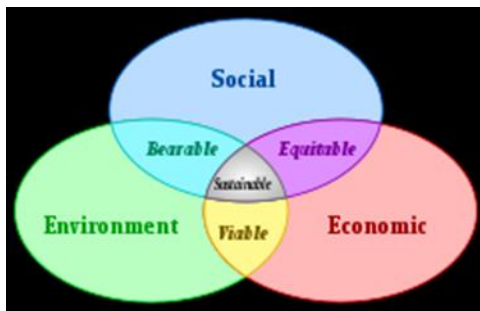
- An inclusive, open, community owned platform for all wine actors to contribute to and learn from discussions about sustainability.
- A place and a process for moderated, documented, transparent, constructive, multi-stakeholder discussions to build consensus around responses to questions that now puzzle or even divide an industry where it should be united. For example, can the wine community agree on core values and a mission? What should be the sector's over-arching sustainability goals, metrics, or relationship to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? How to work together in tackling climate chaos. How to communicate sustainability. How to verify green marketing claims.
- That same place and process can garner agreement on sustainability standards, honoring and building on the best existing models. Global principles and standards that can be consistently adapted to local conditions would benefit everyone in the wine value chain -- from grape growers to wineries, traders, retailers and consumers.
- A neutral, multi-stakeholder roundtable is a proven way to get agreement on risk assessment methodologies, progress reporting, data stewardship and governance, eco-claims and labels, and assurance systems – including certification.
- A host for technical working groups assigned to specific issues such as the use of conflictive inputs,

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pest control, adapting vineyards to climate change, energy and water conservation, or the ecological value and marketability of new packaging proposals.

- A way to foster precompetitive collaboration (while maintaining rigorous antitrust practices).
- A forum for finding common ground on policy and regulations; a voice that speaks for the wine industry.
- A place to highlight innovations, solutions, best practices, models, brilliant examples.
- A central data bank and information sharing center.

### **Why sustainability?**



Sustainability addresses the environmental, social and economic challenges in one, holistic and integrated approach. Sustainable agriculture is well-defined and practiced on millions of farms worldwide with proven benefits for people, planet and profitability. The concept is equally entrenched in processing (i.e. wineries), manufacturing, packaging, logistics and supply chain management. Once the province of only the most progressive companies, sustainability is now seen as an essential component of modern business. Companies that have successfully integrated sustainability into their business model are more efficient, durable, prosperous and resilient -- and more attractive to investors and consumers.

There are excellent local and regional sustainability standards for wine. Sustainable practices are quickly spreading among vineyards and wineries. Consumers - accustomed to certified sustainable coffee, chocolate and other beloved products - are looking for sustainable wine. But the lack of a common definition of sustainability allows confusion to hinder progress. A roundtable would bring coherence, standardized definitions of terms, and a clear path forward for everyone in the wine sector.

### **Is a global sustainable wine roundtable needed?**

Most other globally traded products derived from land or sea have roundtables or a similar alliance that brings all sector stakeholders together to agree on a vision, principles and standards for sustainability. There are proven models for coffee, tea, cocoa, soy, bananas, palm oil, biofuels, timber and non-timber forest products, fish, cotton and many other crops.

Many of these roundtables were formed as a response to criticisms and campaigns by NGOs, activists, investors and governments. The wine sector is not yet in the critic's crosshairs; we have an opportunity to go on the sustainability offense rather than wait and play defense. We need a global center to host the discussions and manage the formal standard-setting process. Do we need a new organization, or can we build on existing platforms?

The web-based [SustainableWine](#) forum manages a vigorous, inclusive and global discussion of sustainability issues in wine. It has offered to serve as the communications hub during the development

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of a roundtable. (And could continue as the communications arm of the roundtable.) It is objective and not linked to a specific sector of the wine industry nor geography.

[FIVS](#) is an international federation that works for the overall sustainability of the global alcohol beverage sector. It has developed the [Global Wine Sector Sustainability Principles](#). The California Sustainable Winegrowing Program and similar schemes in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia are modeled on these sustainability principles.

The [Porto Protocol Foundation](#) is a non-profit corporate institution founded by Taylor's Port. It includes hundreds of members united by a binding commitment to make a greater contribution to mitigate climate change.

The International Organisation of Vine and Wine ([OIV](#)), is an intergovernmental scientific and technical organisation working on wine and other vine-based products.

The [Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable](#) works to reduce consumption, mitigate impacts, and ensure sustainable continuity and future of the global beverage industry. BIER brings together global leaders in the beverage industry to advance the sector's environmental sustainability.

There are other organizations that touch on wine sustainability. And there are progressive, competent, impactful sustainable wine standards managed by local, regional and national groups. While no existing organization has the structure and ambition to grow into the global sustainable wine roundtable envisioned here, they all have critical roles to play and much to contribute.

### **Is a global, sustainable wine standard needed?**

There are good sustainability standards for wine, and they share substantial similarity. A global standard would amalgamate existing initiatives -- taking the best from each -- and represent the wine community's consensus on exactly what sustainability means and how it is executed and measured. It would manifest agreement on sustainability vision and goals. A global standard would combine existing standards and include additional issues, learnings and best practices from round the world, and science-based guidance on contentious subjects. The roundtable would provide a toolkit for adapting the standard to a local context.

Existing standards holders could use the global standard as a general framework and add their local interpretations and practices. The roundtable would not impose its standard in any case.

### **How would the global sustainable wine roundtable be formed, structured and governed?**

In forming a global roundtable, the wine community can learn from the experiences of the groups already operating in the wine world, as well as from those in other sectors. A volunteer working group would draft a vision and mission and propose a governance structure; then invite input from anyone interested. Roundtables often have an elected board of directors, an assembly of delegates and/or chambers ensuring balance among stakeholders (e.g. grape growers, wineries, traders, retailers, markets, and environmental and social groups).

As the roundtable gets under way, it will need a secretariat and staff to manage major initiatives such as standard setting and issue-specific working groups. Roundtables are often funded by member dues and donations. Membership is voluntary. Some examples:

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[Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil](#) [Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials](#)

[Global Coffee Platform](#) [Ethical Tea Partnership](#) [Union for Ethical Bioproducts](#)

### **How would the roundtable set a global sustainable wine standard?**

There is a well-established process for setting social and environmental standards to ensure that they are necessary, relevant, rigorous, transparent, accessible, and designed for continuous improvement. ISEAL, the international organization that supports voluntary standards and certification, has [codified good practices in standard setting](#).

One of the most important practices is an open and inclusive public consultation to ensure that every interested voice is heard. The organizations with sustainable wine standards obviously have much to contribute. In fact, standards experts who have reviewed the existing wine standards believe that – taken together – they cover most key issues. There is reassuring overlap in the sustainability principles of the various schemes that would form the basis of a global standard. The more detailed criteria and indicators would be flexible enough to adapt to local situations.

A global standard would have many benefits for viticulturists, winemakers, wine businesses and consumers. One of those benefits would be a way to harmonize standards and certification programs. The roundtable could establish its own certification program and/or accredit existing programs after a process of benchmarking, gap analysis and alignment.

We welcome comments, and further discussion. Please send your views and expressions of interest to [tom@sustainablewine.co.uk](mailto:tom@sustainablewine.co.uk). We will collate them all, read and review them all, and be in touch in January 2021, when we plan to set up a series of Zoom calls to discuss next steps.

### **About our group:**

The idea for the above came originally from Richard Bampfield MW [in this podcast](#) a couple of years ago on [sustainablewine.co.uk](http://sustainablewine.co.uk). Since then, Agatha Pereira and Toby Webb, as founders of SW, have held two conferences, one in London in November 2019 with 140 wine executives, and then in November 2020 online with more than 1100 registrations and over 700 participants. A number of people have been instrumental in helping us do this, and they have formed the basis of our initial group to ‘sense check’ the ideas in this concept note. [Chris Wille](#) has served as lead author on this paper, bringing together the views of our group, and reflecting those of the conference speakers and attendees at our recent event.

Others who are involved in this process so far (we all work as volunteers, and Sustainable Wine operates as a non profit company at this stage) include:

- Anna Chilton, independent wine and supply chains expert
- Richard Bampfield MW
- Anne Jones, Waitrose category manager: Wines, Beers and Spirits. MW student and member of the Champagne Academy. Member of WineGB Sustainability Workgroup.
- Sally Evans, owner and winemaker, Château George 7 (Bordeaux)
- Kirk Wille, president and director of marketing, Loosen Bros. USA
- Lauren Holman, UK export manager, Château Léoube
- Hanna Halmari, editor, [sustainablewine.co.uk](http://sustainablewine.co.uk)

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We are aware that many others in the wine industry, from retailers to grape growers, are interested in the questions raised in this short paper. We see two choices for those. Be an observer and stay informed with our work, or become a more active participant, and help us shape the next stages of this area.

We look forward to hearing from you. One final time, if you'd like to express an interest, please email Tom at [tom@sustainablewine.co.uk](mailto:tom@sustainablewine.co.uk) letting us know if you'd like to be an observer or an active participant, and we will be in touch in January 2021.