

## Wine Spectator online

### As Oregon Salmon Struggle, Wineries Chip In to Help

**Producers that protect and restore the state's waterways can use the Salmon Safe label on their wines**

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Posted: Wednesday, May 18, 2005

Oregon salmon are having a tough go of it this year, with unseasonable drought conditions dramatically cutting down the number of fish swimming up the state's rivers to spawn. While wine may not seem to have much to do with salmon (away from the dinner table, at least), many Oregon wineries are doing their part to protect the fish.

Numerous vineyard owners are participating in a program run by Portland-based Salmon Safe, a nonprofit organization devoted to cleaning up waterways in both agricultural and urban areas so that the fish can thrive. In recent decades, native species of salmon have been declining in number due to overfishing, pollution of streams from development, farm irrigation, poor forestry practices and the use of hydropower.

Salmon Safe, which got its start in 1995, currently works with 75 vineyards and 24 wineries, encompassing more than one-third of Oregon's vineyard acreage, said managing director Dan Kent. The participating wineries are mostly located in the Willamette Valley, through which the Willamette River and its tributaries, where many salmon spawn, flow.

The organization offers a Salmon Safe certification to conventional and organic growers that meet its standards for avoiding harm to nearby streams and salmon populations. A third-party certifying agency, such as organic certifier Oregon Tilth, assesses each vineyard's management practices, looking for efforts to protect and restore salmon habitat, such as planting trees to stabilize stream banks, growing cover crops to control soil run-off into waterways and using natural methods to control weeds and pests rather than chemical pesticides that can leach into streams. The certification is free in watersheds that are polluted or at risk of becoming polluted, such as the Rogue Valley. In other areas, growers pay a vineyard-assessment fee.

Wineries that pass the inspection are allowed to use a special Salmon Safe logo or gold seal on their bottles to inform customers of their commitment to making waterways on or near their property safe for salmon.

"We have seen that the Salmon Safe logo on a bottle of wine is compelling to consumers," Kent said. To help get the point across, the organization holds month-long Salmon Safe promotions in supermarkets and natural-food stores such as Wild Oats.

Willamette Valley Vineyards incorporates the certification into its marketing. "We use that information for chain buyers, like Whole Foods," said founder and president Jim Bernau.

"There are more and more chains and restaurant organizations that are interested in wines produced using a sustainable approach."

Ed King III, CEO of King Estate in the southern Willamette Valley, said that in addition to the Salmon Safe certification, the winery has also earned organic certification, because their concerns for the fish extend to other aspects of the environment. "There are a lot of birds, animals and soil organisms outside the watershed that also need our protection," King said. "And what about the people that drink the wine? What about people who work in the vineyards?"

This year, the salmon's struggle may impact the Willamette Valley's wine industry directly, through the area's big annual International Pinot Noir Celebration, which includes a traditional salmon bake. Kevin Kennedy, chef in charge of sourcing the fish for the event, said that procuring enough Oregon salmon for the feast may present problems this year. "Three days prior to the closing of the spring season, there were 269 salmon over the Bonneville Dam [on the Columbia River]," he said. "Normally you'd expect to see about 2,300 by that date."

"We'd like to showcase Oregon products," Kennedy said, "but if we have to, we can get salmon from Washington or Alaska."