

Organic, Biodynamic & Sustainable



Before the U.S. government began regulating the use of the term “organic” in viticulture, the concept of “organic wine” conjured up images of pony-tailed vintners in tie-dyed T-shirts, producing wine more for ideology rather than taste. However, today organic wines are much different than they were years ago; wine lovers drink them for their quality. So what does it mean when a label says ‘organic’?

Since winemaking falls into two general categories: growing and producing, there are multiple criteria which must be met in order to garnish an organic label. Though the criteria varies across countries, so determining what organic exactly means can be dubious at best.



Let’s cover the basic tenants of organically-grown grapes and certified organic wine in the U.S. First, organically-grown grapes cannot have any synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or soil fumigants used on them. Many growers and producers use organically grown grapes in their wines but are not certified organic. There is a difference. In order to be certified as organic wine, it must contain 100% organically-grown grapes and any other agricultural ingredients must be certified organic, except ones regulated by the National Organic Program. Sulfites *can’t* be added in certified organic wines but they can still be in there (up to 10 parts per million), because they are naturally occurring.

Wines made from organically grown grapes but are not certified can have sulfites up to 100 ppm, and the other agricultural ingredients do not need to be certified organic. Some vineyards, by decision, stop short of the full organic certification process, because of the cost or because they would need to meet added requirements in the winemaking process. There are often debates between vineyards about organic vs non-organic wine.

Often you will see indications that wines are sustainably or biodynamically-grown/produced, which are not regulated but refer to a range of viticultural practices that are both ecologically and socially responsible by utilizing natural farming methods, environmental conservation and renewable resources. Biodynamic goes a step further by employing how astrological and lunar elements affect the vines. Biodynamic wines/vineyards, organic vineyards, and natural wines can (but don’t always) have up to 300 ppm of sulfites in a finished wine. Some third-party agencies offer sustainable certifications, but the standards are often unclear.

