



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:** Sean Carroll  
707-522-5865 (o)  
707-803-1870 (m)

## **Sonoma County Winegrowers Win Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award**

**Sustainable Winegrowing Program Recognized with  
California's Highest Environmental Honor**

**SACRAMENTO, Calif. (January 20, 2016)** – Nearly two years ago to the day that Sonoma County Winegrowers announced a goal to become the nation's first 100% sustainable winegrowing region, the organization has been recognized with California's highest environmental honor – the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award (GEELA).

The GEELA program recognizes individuals, organizations, and businesses that have demonstrated exceptional leadership and made notable contributions in conserving California's precious resources, protecting and enhancing our environment, and building public-private partnerships. The annual award is administered by the California Environmental Protection Agency, in partnership with the Natural Resources Agency, the Department of Food and Agriculture, the State Transportation Agency, the Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency, the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and the Health and Human Services Agency. The award was presented last night to Karissa Kruse, president of Sonoma County Winegrowers, and members of the executive committee, during a special reception at the headquarters of the California Environmental Protection Agency in Sacramento.

"It's an incredible honor to win the Governor's premier award for environmental leadership and it validates the depth of our sustainability program that focuses on being socially responsible, environmentally conscientious, and economically viable," said Kruse. She added, "This recognition is a testament to the dedication and leadership of our 1,800 grape growers who have worked tirelessly to ensure we positively impact our community and preserve agriculture here in Sonoma County."

Earlier this month, Kruse announced that the Sonoma County Winegrowers would focus on social sustainability to support the wine community's skilled workforce and their families. To help accomplish this the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation is being relaunched and will work with a number of community-based organizations and government agencies in Sonoma County which provide resources and support to agricultural employees and their families. The Foundation's initial efforts will be to bridge the gap between existing programs and the individuals who should benefit them in the areas of healthcare, affordable housing, childcare and education.

"I congratulate Sonoma County Winegrowers on this recognition of their remarkable commitment to the Sustainable Winegrowing Program. It is a fitting tribute to the dedicated and collaborative efforts of grape growers throughout the county, said Karen Ross, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture."

Sonoma County's Winegrowers take a triple-bottom line approach to sustainability that is environmentally-conscious in how they conduct their vineyard and winery practices; is socially-responsible in how they treat their employees, neighbors and local community and economically-viable so the business remains productive and profitable. Each aspect of the triple-bottom line approach must meet strict criteria that was reviewed and vetted by environmental policy advocates, wine industry leaders and other stakeholders. Among the highlights of the past twelve months:

- 37,392 vineyard acres (64%) of Sonoma County's 58,280 vineyard acres have been sustainably self-assessed;
- 27,761 vineyard acres (48%) have been certified sustainable by a third party audit;
- 18,780 vineyard acres participate in the Fish-Friendly environmental program;
- 1,171 vineyard acres participate in the USDA Organic Farming program;
- 240 vineyard acres participate in Biodynamic Farming Practices;
- More than 1,280 Sonoma County grape growers participated in sustainability workshops, meetings and related events in 2015; and
- More than 162,340 pounds of vineyard material was recycled by growers in 2015.

For a Sonoma County vineyard to become sustainable growers must complete a self-assessment of each vineyard that includes a comprehensive set of 138 best practices that are rated on a scale of 1 to 4. Next, a plan is developed to document year-to-year improvements focused on water conservation, water quality, energy efficiency, employee and neighbor relations, business viability and more. Once growers complete their self-assessment, they work with an independent third-party auditor to review their assessment, conduct onsite visits to the vineyard to evaluate and validate the practices and review the annual improvement plan. If the auditors, who are environmental scientists, biologists, chemists, professors, geologists and other trained

professionals, approve the vineyard, then the grower receives certification. In 2015, the organization unveiled its 100-year business plan which it developed to preserve agriculture in Sonoma County well into the 22nd Century. The 100-year plan is believed to be the first of its kind in agriculture and the global wine industry. It was also the next step in the evolution of Sonoma County's efforts to have all of their wines grown and made in a sustainable manner.

"Two years ago our Board of Directors put a major stake in the ground to become America's first 100% sustainable wine region and we're proud of the global recognition we are receiving, including the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award," said Kevin Barr, chairman of the Sonoma County Winegrowers board of commissioners and owner of Redwood Empire Vineyard Management Company. He added, "Our grape growers have been farming in Sonoma County for generations and we're committed to always being positive contributors to our local community by continuously improving our practices and leading by example."

**-end-**

**About Sonoma County Winegrowers:**

The Sonoma County Winegrape Commission, also known as Sonoma County Winegrowers (SCW), is a marketing and education organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Sonoma County as one of the world's premier grape growing regions. SCW has oversight by the California Department of Food and Agriculture and seeks to increase awareness and recognition of the quality and diversity of Sonoma County's grapes and wines through dynamic marketing and educational programs targeted to wine consumers around the world. In January 2014, SCW committed to becoming the nation's first 100% sustainable winegrowing region by 2019. Currently, 64% of the vineyard acreage in Sonoma County has gone through the sustainability self-assessment and 48% of vineyards are certified by a third party auditor. For more information about SCW and its programs, visit [www.sonomawinegrape.org](http://www.sonomawinegrape.org)