

Healthy Soils and Climate-Smart Vineyards: North Coast RCDs and Partners Receive CDFA Specialty Crop Block Grant for Climate Beneficial Practices on Vineyards

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As researchers continue to seek practical solutions for mitigating (or lessening) the effects of climate change, they keep coming back to the solution in the soil. Life within the soil, whether it's growing roots or soil microorganisms, all use the carbon that's in the atmosphere as their building blocks. That is why CA Department of Food and Agriculture has awarded the local resource conservation districts (Mendocino, Sonoma and Napa County RCDs) a \$394,425 grant for the development of climate beneficial management practices on vineyards over the next two years. The goal of this project will be the creation of a network for grape-growers in the three counties to participate in scientific field trials of soil health and climate beneficial BMPs, with the goal of understanding how different soil management practices sequester carbon, affect vine health and grape quality. The project will also provide opportunities for hands-on learning, farmer-to-farmer communication and mentoring, and an expanded network of regional farm trials.

These climate beneficial practices might include timed irrigation/fertigation to increase nitrogen uptake by vines, compost application, hedgerow planting, cover cropping and grazing, reduced and non-tillage, and more. These practices are being examined by researchers and will be examined through RCD trails for their ability to sequester carbon dioxide, retain water, reduce the need for synthetic fertilizers, amendments and pesticides, and maintain grape quality and quantity.

One of the vineyards participating in the field trials the is Santa Rosa Junior College's Shone Farm. Vineyard manager Mark Sanchiotti says about the project, "we're excited for this new opportunity to work with this group to try out carbon beneficial practices at Shone Farm in the vineyards and across other areas of the farm". Merilark Padgett-Johnson SRCJ's Department Chair/Program Coordinator/Instructor of their Viticulture Program is "excited to have myself and my students educated on how to measure carbon benefits in the soil" and use this a learning opportunity for professors and students alike.

Increasing adoption of regionally appropriate practices to improve climate resiliency will help sustain the North Coast as a world class viticulture region. Wine industry customers have begun drawing linkages between sustainable practices and climate change, and industry leaders have begun marketing their efforts towards carbon neutrality. The project will create a model for the industry throughout California by integrating state and federal soil health and greenhouse gas initiatives.

