

DUVARITA VINEYARD



FARMER FEATURE: DUVARITA VINEYARD



Duvarita Vineyard, owned by Brook Williams, is located in Lompoc, CA, about ten miles from the Pacific Ocean. The coastal, foggy climate is perfect for pinot noir, chardonnay, syrah, and grenache

grapes. Duvarita's grapes are distinct to the terroir of the land, and are notorious for their salty, saline, mineral, and wild fruit-like character. The vines are planted close together and low to the ground to protect them from the ocean breezes and provide heat from the soil. The sandy soils of the south facing slope provide light reflection, but also make it hard to retain water. Brook has looked to biodynamic principles and regenerative farming to bring the soil to life.

Brook has worked in wineries since 1989, and decided to try life on the other side of the wine cellar – "in the dirt," as he says – in 2012, when he and his siblings bought the Duvarita property, which is 28 acres of grapes. In 2015, they bought the neighboring 514-acre property – called Christy & Wise, after the wool merchant who used to own the property – the largest wool merchant on the pacific coast at that time.

LEVELING UP WITH REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE



Through Kiss the Ground's Farmland Transition Program, Brook was able to attend [Soil Health Academy's training](#), which was the catalyst for adopting regenerative agriculture practices on the vineyard. "The training was great; it's a life changer," he says. The training taught him a lot about taking care of what's in between the vines, not just the grapes themselves. Since he didn't grow up farming, he acknowledges that he's not stuck in his ways and is open to change in practices. "If you make wine out of fear, everything will turn out generic." If you make wine with joy, it will be more

interesting and full of character.

Brook has been practicing biodynamic since 2014, and was certified biodynamic in 2017. Since taking SHA's training, he's implemented no-till in the vineyard, cover-cropping (including more perennials), sheep grazing, and more recently, a rotating chicken coop. Brook collaborates with another of Kiss the Ground's Transition Program farmers - [Cuyama Lamb](#) - for the sheep grazing. Cuyama brings their sheep to the vineyard to graze the land once a year, reducing fire fuels, mowing passes, and providing manure to enrich the soil. Brook has also planted a fruit orchard near the vineyard - including apricot, apple, peach, and nectarine trees - and a friend planted lavender that Brook now cultivates.

HEALTHY SOIL, HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM



These changes have made a noticeable difference in the biodiversity of the land and the quality of the soil. "The soil smells different," says Brook. The plants look different too; he's not sure how or why, but he can feel it, stating that if you live on the property you can sense the difference. It's also a lot noisier – wild birds have made the property home, as well as more bugs, snakes, and different plants, but not too much of any one thing, signifying a healthy and diverse ecosystem.

The first couple years of transition were not without challenges. In fact, overall yields decreased when Brook started no-till, but this was to be expected. However, this year, Brook expects yields to increase due to the increase in soil organic matter. He can tell by the color of the grapes and the appearance of the vine shoots. California's long-standing drought made Brook focus specifically on soil organic matter. He increased compost application, now applying 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre. This year the vineyard received about 10 inches of rainwater; the average for the area is 14, so this year was manageable, and not the worst he's ever seen. In years past the vineyard got as little as 6 inches. Brook relies on drip irrigation and groundwater in the vineyard.

The increase in soil fertility and biodiversity on the land has meant reduced pest pressure and a reduced need to spray organic fungicides. The biggest threats to the grapes are powdery mildew and gophers. The powdery mildew, a result of the coastal, foggy climate, tends to attack the green grapes, so Brook needs to spray in the springtime before the grapes mature. Since adopting regenerative practices, Brook can skip one or two courses of spraying, often increasing spray intervals to up to 14 or 17 days.

GROWING A COMMUNITY

In the beginning, it was challenging to retain consultants and employees because they were used to farming conventionally. However, the script has flipped. In the last two years, so many people have called Brook to learn biodynamics and regenerative practices that he's had to turn some of them away. He's happy to see the change in attitude. He's even noticed some other grape-growers in the area copying techniques that he started a couple years ago.

Brook grows grapes for a few different, local winemakers – [Dragonnette Cellars](#), [The Ojai Vineyard](#), [Denner Vineyards](#), [Walson Holland](#), [Casa Dumetz Wines](#), [Lindquist Family Wines](#), storm and [Camins2dreams](#) (an all female, Native American label). They have all known Brook for the past ten years or found him through word of mouth. Some of his buyers are curious about the practices Brook uses, and bring their teams out to the land for retreats to see the vines, while others only know that the grapes are good and don't have any interest in how they got that way. Demand for Brook's grapes is high; he had to turn some buyers away during the transition period when his yields were low, but he expects to be able to fill extra orders this year, and maybe even have excess for his own label.

When asked if he sees a future in regenerative agriculture, Brook says "How can you not? Bite the bullet. Do the right thing and get as much carbon into the soil as you can."

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