



SustainableWine  
ROUNDTABLE

November 2024

# SWR STANDARDS BENCHMARKING PILOT STUDY

Ensuring transparency and sharing best practice

---

PREPARED BY:

Dr. Peter Stanbury  
*Research Director*

Delaney Sheridan  
*Operations Manager*



# Executive Summary



This report sets out the findings of SWR's pilot of its benchmarking of the world's wine sustainability standards. There are more than 40 sustainability standards in wine, and the aim of our benchmark is to provide comparability between them. The pilot process was our means to test out the methodology we have developed to conduct the benchmark. It covered seven standards.

We are publishing two versions of this report. The full report, containing the detailed analysis of each of the standards evaluated will be available to members only. A shorter report detailing the methodology and overarching findings will be publicly available.

The report starts by setting out the methodology which SWR developed to undertake the benchmarking process. In 2023 we wrote and published the Global Reference Framework (GRF) as the first global statement of what sustainability in wine encompasses. It builds on existing knowledge in the wine industry, but also on the experience from other similar sectors. In early 2024, we also developed a scoring matrix to allow each standard to be compared to the GRF. The paper then explains the practical process used to conduct the evaluation, as well as the governance structures in place to ensure that the benchmarking process is robust.

A key reason for conducting an initial pilot before embarking on the full benchmarking process was to test out the methodology and see whether any changes are needed. In practice, our approach worked well. We conducted an initial review of the documentation of each standard, and then submitted a report to the standards body in each case. We then held discussions with that standards body. However, it is clear that we need to allow more time in each case for discussion so that an agreed position can be agreed between us and the standards body. In a couple of instances in the pilot, standards bodies felt slightly rushed. We will take this into account as we roll out our process to the remaining standards.

Although the central aim of the benchmarking process is to allow cross-comparability of standards, our work so far has identified a number of wider issues which help deepen insights into sustainability in wine.

Although standards are intended to demonstrate sustainability good practice to third parties, they arguably have a more important role in providing guidance to those running vineyards and wineries about what tasks 'sustainability' requires of them. Sustainability is complex and will require these businesses to address a wide range of issues, from viticultural practices to carbon management to labour standards. Standards need to provide a clear inventory of what this range of issues is.

Reviewing standards from very different parts of the world has reinforced the importance of having locally-developed standards in preference to a single, global standard. The standards reviewed contain a huge level of geographically-specific information and insight. This means both that the specific requirements of standards can be tailored to the particular circumstances of the region, and that information and support provided to vineyards and wineries can be focussed on addressing those circumstances.



Although our meetings with the standards organisations were initially intended as a means of discussing with them the issues we had identified in the scope and governance of their standards, in practice, they also served to provide a great deal more insight into how the bodies operate on a day-to-day basis, and the ways in which they engage with businesses certified to their standard, or seeking to do so. In every case, albeit in different ways, the standards bodies provide quite significant help to wine businesses in their sustainability journey.

It is a mantra of almost all sustainability standards, not just those in wine, that they want to see companies engaged on a process of continuous improvement. To a large extent, this makes perfect sense. Sustainability encompasses a wide range of actions, across a spectrum of different topics. No organisation can work on all fronts at once, and so performance and good practice can only be put in place over time. In all of the standards reviewed, a key focus was on planning and prioritisation, so that wine businesses had a multi-year plan to improve their sustainability performance continuously, and in a structured fashion. However, it is also clear that the standards themselves are engaged in a process of continuous improvement – regularly updating their requirements and approach to reflect improving knowledge and changes on the ground.

Although, as we observe in a number of the evaluations, labour rights issues remain an area where standards need to do more. That said, it is pleasing that all those we have spoken to are at least prepared to talk about these issues, and to recognise their importance. We are hopeful that, over time, standards will be as robust in relation to these issues as they already are on environmental topics.

The longer version of this report, available to SWR's members, also contains our evaluations of the initial seven standards which were reviewed. In each case a detailed scoring graphic is provided, demonstrating how well the standard reflected issues of wine sustainability as set out in the GRF. However, in each case, we have also provided a detailed narrative which is intended to give a more nuanced and detailed insight into each standard.

We would like to express our deep thanks to the sustainability organisations which we reviewed in this pilot. Whilst we think the process went well, there were challenges and we are very grateful for these organisations for their patience and support in making the process work. We look forward to rolling the process out to the remaining sustainability standards over the coming months. This will be done in groups of 8-10. We intend to complete the process by the summer of 2025, and the benchmark will then be repeated annually.

# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Benchmarking Process .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Background .....	6
Development of the Global Reference Framework .....	6
The scoring matrix .....	7
Methodology .....	7
Governance, transparency and oversight .....	8
Robustness of the process .....	8
Transparency and oversight .....	8
Observations on the process .....	9
Engagement with standards bodies .....	9
What each evaluation contains. ....	10
Weighting .....	11
Explanation of Scoring .....	11
<b>Overarching issues arising .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Standards: Guidance or certification? .....	12
Local relevance .....	12
Audit burden vs inclusivity .....	13
Providing support .....	13
Continuous improvement .....	14
Continuous improvement of standards: <i>expanding scope</i> .....	14
Addressing labour rights violations .....	15
Auditors and labour rights .....	15
Structuring a standard .....	16

# Introduction



This report presents the findings of SWR's pilot of its standards benchmarking process. There are more than 40 sustainability standards in wine, and the aim of our benchmark is to provide comparability between them. The pilot process was our means to test out the methodology we have developed to conduct the benchmark.

SWR has been working on standards benchmarking for more than two years. Initially, we explored the idea of creating a single global standard for sustainability in wine—a seemingly straightforward solution to the complexity created by the current proliferation of standards. However, an initial review of existing standards conducted in 2022 made it clear that geographically-specific standards are essential. Most are tailored to the unique growing conditions of their respective regions. We talk about the importance of terroir when it comes to wines - the same is true of wine sustainability standards.

At the same time, while the specifics of sustainability differ across regions, there is a clear need to define the overarching topics and issues that collectively constitute sustainability in wine. Moreover, there are also lessons on what sustainability looks like which the wine industry can learn from other sectors.

This led to the development of SWR's Global Reference Framework (GRF), which included best practices in existing wine standards, but also drew on the experience of other agricultural supply chains, and on other sustainability standards such as the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative and Amfori BSCI. The GRF is, therefore, the first global statement of what sustainability in wine encompasses.

The benchmarking process compares each existing standard against the GRF, assessing how well they align, where they excel, and where gaps may exist. To support this, we developed a scoring matrix to systematically evaluate each standard.

Our initial review in 2022 revealed that standards bodies have approached the development of their standards in markedly different ways and with varying priorities. A simple numeric score would fail to capture these nuances, underscoring the need to provide context about each standard's objectives and approach. The scores in this document, therefore, reflect where a standard is now in relation to good sustainability practices: the narratives we have provided in each case explain the wider journey which each standard is on and how it seeks to develop over time.

A key role of SWR is to share best practices in wine sustainability. This pilot has already surfaced examples of expertise and innovation that other standards bodies can learn from. We need to remember that a standard is not just a 'badge' to demonstrate a level of practice, it is perhaps more usefully a management tool to inform how a wine business operates. By looking at where best practice exists, our aim is to help all standards, wherever they are, to learn from what others are doing.

The pilot, which involved seven standards, was designed to test the benchmarking process, and we are deeply grateful to the participating standards bodies for their collaboration. While the methodology worked well overall, we identified lessons that will inform the next phases of the benchmarking process. These assessments will continue in groups of approximately ten standards at a time, with scores and narratives reported upon completion of each group. A final benchmarking report will be published in early summer 2025. The benchmark will then be repeated annually to report on progress each standard is making.

# The Benchmarking Process

## Background

Globally, there are more than 40 sustainability standards in the wine sector and SWR has been working on these standards since 2022. The reason for this focus was two-fold. Firstly, the sheer range and variability between standards is confusing. It is not clear how they are alike and how they differ. There is a need for comparability – a ‘read across’ between standards – to provide clarity, and avoid the risk of greenwash. Secondly, standards are more than simply a ‘badge’ of certification, they are principally meant to be guidance tools to provide management teams in wine businesses with clear sets of actions to take in relation to sustainability. Our benchmarking of standards is, therefore, intended to provide comparability and to facilitate exchange of best practice between standards bodies.

## Development of the Global Reference Framework

To facilitate this process, it became clear that we needed to develop a point of reference against which to benchmark the 40+ standards. Even if the specifics differ from location to location, there was nonetheless a need to define the range of topics and issues which collectively constitute sustainability in wine.

This led to the development of the Global Reference Framework which is the first global analysis of what sustainability in wine means. This was developed in three stages:

### 1. Initial Review of Sustainability Standards

We undertook an initial review of 25 of the existing sustainability standards. This identified that the process of benchmarking them was rather more complicated than just comparing which issues each did or did not include. Standards differ, not just in the aspects of sustainability they cover, but in how they seek to develop over time – what might be called their ‘philosophy’. It also became apparent from this process that inclusivity and collaboration were also important factors to a standard’s reach and impact.

### 2. Learning from Other Sectors

As a second phase of work, we wanted to ensure that a reference framework drew not only on the knowledge and expertise within the wine supply chain, but also on the experience from other similar sectors. Wine is relatively new to the sustainability game. Therefore, it made sense to draw on lessons from other agricultural sectors like oil palm, cocoa and consumer goods, and from other sustainability standards such as the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative and Amfori BSCI.

### 3. Creating the Global Reference Framework

In the second half of 2023, all of the insights from the first two phases of work were drawn together into a new Global Reference Framework as a single, research-backed statement of what sustainability in wine currently encompasses. As our knowledge and understanding of sustainability expands and changes over time – in some cases driven by SWR’s own work on issues such as wine packaging – the GRF will need to be revised periodically to reflect this.



## The scoring matrix

The GRF is at the heart of our process of benchmarking the more than 40 sustainability standards in wine. However, it was also necessary to create a mechanism to enable the GRF to be used to assess each standard. In spring 2024, therefore, we worked with a consultative group of SWR members to develop a scoring matrix to enable us to use the GRF to generate scores for each standard across the various sets of issues.

It was proposed by the consultative group that to test out the scoring process that we undertook an initial pilot of a small number of standards. This document reports on that pilot study.

## Methodology

The benchmarking process has been undertaken by Dr Peter Stanbury and Delaney Sheridan. In each case, the process of evaluation has been as follows:

### 1. Document Collection:

Each standard holder provided the latest version of their standard documentation, along with any ancillary reference materials.

### 2. Independent Review:

Peter and Delaney independently reviewed the documentation and used the scoring matrix to evaluate the standards across various criteria. Observations of particular relevance or significance were also recorded in the scoring matrix.

### 3. Collaborative Review:

These independent scores and observations were then compared. While minor differences in interpretation arose, there were no significant discrepancies or major differences in view regarding the evaluated standards.

### 4. Preliminary Analysis:

A summary of our analysis was then prepared, focusing on areas where more information was needed, and where the standard appeared to fall short of the requirements set by the GRF.

### 5. Engagement with Standards Holders:

A meeting was then held with the respective standard owner to discuss the preliminary assessment. In some cases, issues have been resolved by pointing us in the direction of new documentation. In others, standards have accepted that we have identified an area where they need to improve, and undertaken to make changes over time. There are, of course, also areas where our view and that of the standards body do not accord.

### 6. Written Responses and Revisions:

In most cases, standards holders provided a written response to the preliminary assessment. These responses were instrumental in refining the evaluation. Where necessary, additional iterations of scoring and narrative development were undertaken to address outstanding issues and arrive at an agreed upon position.

### 7. Final Scoring and Evaluation:

A final scoring and narrative document was compiled and shared with the standards holder for review. The analyses and scores presented in this report are based on these finalized evaluations.



## Governance, transparency and oversight

As the GRF makes clear, good governance and robust audit processes are crucial to the credibility of a standard. Similarly, it behoved us, in developing our tools and conducting the standards benchmark process that we were able to demonstrate good governance of the process, be transparent and show that our work had received sufficient oversight from other experts and from the SWR membership.

### *Robustness of the process*

When SWR began its work in this area, an initial idea considered was the development of a single, global standard for sustainability in wine. This would have been created under the aegis of the ISEAL Alliance, a global body working on sustainability across a range of sectors and issues.

Even though we ultimately decided against the creation of a single standard, for reasons stated elsewhere, we believed it important to ensure that the approach we did take was informed by ISEAL's model. Accordingly, our work over the past two and a half years has been informed by ISEAL's [Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Checklist](#) which contains 30 recommended steps.

Moreover, the GRF itself was developed using robust research techniques and included key informant interviews and a review of relevant literature. The document also includes full references to clearly indicate the sources of the information provided.

### *Transparency and oversight*

The work to develop the GRF and scoring matrix, and the benchmarking itself have been undertaken by the SWR operations team (which between us have more than 85 years' experience in sustainability), specifically Dr Peter Stanbury and Delaney Sheridan. However, at all stages of the process we have been transparent about our work and findings, and in ensuring that we built not just on our knowledge and experience but also that of others.

Our work has been presented at each stage to full meetings of SWR's membership. The results of the first stage of development of the GRF was presented in October 2022; the second phase in May 2023; and the final version of the GRF launched in November 2023. The scoring matrix was presented to members in April 2024. At each of these presentations, members were asked to submit comments to the SWR team. This feedback was then included in revisions of the documents.

We also drew together a group of SWR members drawn from across different parts of the wine sector to act as a technical advisory group to review the final version of the GRF and the scoring matrix. This group was made up of representatives of the following members: Cloudy Bay; Equalitas; Robert Hall Winery; Systembolaget; Terra Vitis; Treasury Wine Estates; and The Wine Society. We would very much like to thank these people for their valuable time, and for the advice they provided.





## Observations on the process

In practice, this process has worked extremely well. It is more time consuming than we had expected, but there is a need properly to read the documentation in order really to understand how a standard operates and to formulate clear and sensible questions to ask of the standards bodies. The conversations and email exchanges with those bodies have been extremely helpful, and we feel a high level of confidence in the assessments and the observations we have made.

However, it is clear that more time is required for discussions between us and each standard's body. In developing our process we had been conscious of treading lightly on the valuable time of those working for standards' bodies. Therefore we did not require each standard owner to fill in a questionnaire – we undertook the initial research and analysis on the basis of documentation sent by each standard body and information on its website. We then provided our initial analysis which was then discussed in a Zoom call with representatives of the standards owner.

It is clear, however, that in some cases we need to allow for more 'back and forth' discussions with standards bodies. For some of those covered in this report, a single meeting sufficed to arrive at a scoring and narrative with which both sides were comfortable. In others, more time and interaction was needed. We will allow for this in future.

Aside from this important point, as we move forward to review the remainder of the standards, we see no reason to make and significant changes to the process we have used to-date.

## Engagement with standards bodies



In all cases, the engagement we have had with the standards bodies has been excellent, open, friendly, and transparent. We have tried hard to make clear that the aim of this process is positive – to help share best practice and knowledge, and to support a process of improving all standards over time. Other benchmarking processes have sometimes felt slightly adversarial. We have tried our best, and feel we have succeeded in avoiding this.

There have sometimes been robust discussions on certain points but in all cases, the standards bodies have listened to the points we have made and responded positively. We trust that we too have listened to the points that our interviewees have made to us.

Sometimes, the points we raised were because we had missed certain pieces of information in our initial literature review, and these have been pointed out to us. What has been most revealing though is how much of the richness of what standards bodies do is not reflected in the documentation. The wider support that is provided by standards organisations to the wine businesses they work with is commented on in the evaluation sections of this report. Nonetheless, it is worth commenting on here given how vital it appears to be in helping businesses on their journeys in sustainability.

However, the process of close interaction has been hugely valuable also in getting much better insights into the working of each standards. In a number of cases, these insights have put a different complexion on criticisms which a superficial review of a standard might make.

In the past we have, and as will be apparent from this report, still do maintain that Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW) needs to tighten up its requirements in relation to labour rights issues. However, they took great pains to explain the issues of legal liability in California that makes addressing these issues a matter of great sensitivity. The Standard document already contains a huge amount of really good advice on labour rights issues, and our conversations strongly suggested that there is a willingness to turn that advice into requirements for certification over time. But this needs to be done carefully in an environment where there is pushback even on using the term 'modern slavery.'

The second is the case of Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand (SWNZ) which can be criticised for setting only a low bar for certification. However, they made a strong case that sustainability remains a new topic for many in the NZ wine industry, especially amongst smaller producers. They have, therefore, taken the choice to focus on key topics one at a time and build knowledge, expertise and best practice over time. So yes, at the moment, the bar is low, but there is clearly a plan in place to raise that over time.

The standards bodies seem, largely, to have welcomed externally commentary and critique. "We spend most of our time looking inwards to our own standard and members. It's great to get a perspective about what's going on elsewhere," commented one interviewee. "The standard has been developed over time, and it is perhaps not as focussed as it should be, but it takes someone from outside to spot that and tell us," was another.

## What each evaluation contains

The assessment of each standard contains two components. The first is a scoring of that standard against the issues contained in the GRF. The GRF is a statement of what sustainability in wine involves, and therefore the individual scores demonstrate the degree to which each standard is consonant with that.

The second component is a narrative evaluation of the standard. This reflects the outcome of our initial assessment of that standard, and the following exchanges with the standards body in each case. This narrative is important as it gives important context to the otherwise quite stark quantitative assessment contained in the scoring.

This reflects the fact that this benchmarking processes has two aims. The first is to provide direct comparability between standards. As of now, does the certification label demonstrate that the wine in the bottle it is on has been produced sustainably?

However, the second aim is to support improvement over time. This means that in some cases, these bald scores need to be nuanced so some degree in order to provide a more rounded understanding of each standard. Our role is not to criticise, but rather to point out where a standard falls short in demonstrating sustainability and suggest means by which these issues might be rectified over time. As will become apparent from this report, this is supporting a process that most of the standards bodies are engaged in anyway.

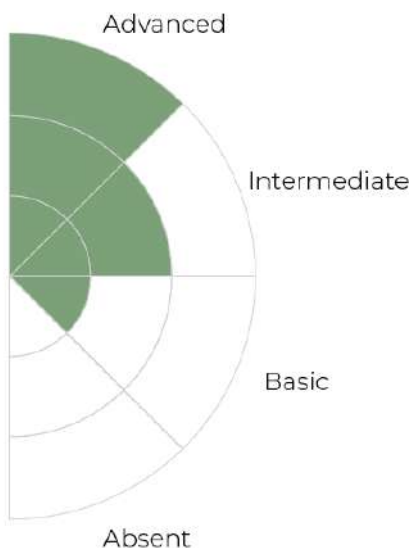
## Weighting

A question posed to us by the consultative group was whether there was a need to weight some issues more than others. Having undertaken this initial pilot we do not believe that a differential weighting is needed. In reality, all of the issues in the GRF are important, and need to be addressed in order to progress in sustainability. Moreover, intuitively, we feel that the respective scoring and assessments we have made of each standard feels right, and reflects reality. A weighting would skew that, which would not be helpful. We feel that the narratives provided in each case provide the nuance required in cases where numerical scores are not properly reflective of how a standard is performing.

## Explanation of Scoring

Scores were determined using a matrix that evaluates the standard against each element of the Global Reference Framework. While the specifics vary by issue, the criteria for each scoring level are outlined below. For detailed information, please refer to the complete scoring matrix.

Level	Requirements	Score
Absent	The topic not mentioned.	0
Basic	The topic is mentioned, with a requirement to meet local, regional and national regulatory requirements.	1
Intermediate	A plan is in place to manage the topic, which includes, analysis of that topic, actions to be taken, targets and target dates, and definition of responsibilities. The plan addresses +/- half of the issues set out in the GRF relevant to that topic. This means that a scheme requires businesses it certifies to be competently managing the focal topic.	2
Advanced	The plan in place addresses all or nearly all of the issues set out in the GRF relevant to that topic. This implies that the scheme is moving beyond capable management of the topic at hand, towards proactive efforts to address and mitigate impacts.	3



An advanced score (3) reflects the highest standard of best practice and is not expected to be achieved across all categories by most standards. This rigorous benchmark was intentionally established to set a clear direction of travel and to encourage continuous improvement within standards bodies.

The scores for each category are displayed using circular diagrams, with each section represented as a circle divided into sub-categories. To aid interpretation, we've provided an example illustrating what scores from 0 to 3 look like.

Please note that the size of each category's segment does not reflect a higher weighting. Instead, sections with more subcategories naturally have more segments.

# Overarching issues arising

The core intention of this benchmarking process is to provide clarity between the world's different wine sustainability standards. However, it is also important that this process teases out some of the broader issues about standards and certification. Having reviewed the pilot studies, a number of wider themes emerged which are important to discuss if we are to have a situation where standards are as useful a tool as possible in pushing forward good practice in sustainability.

## Standards: Guidance or certification?

The goal of SWR's benchmarking process is to enable cross-comparability between different standards, clarifying which certification labels truly indicate that a wine has been made sustainably. In this sense, the process views standards as mechanisms to demonstrate good practice to third parties – be that buyers or end consumers.

However, standards arguably have a more important role in providing guidance to those running vineyards and wineries about what tasks 'sustainability' requires of them. Sustainability is complex and will require these businesses to address a wide range of issues, from viticultural practices to carbon management to labour standards. Standards need to provide a clear inventory of what this range of issues is, so that wine businesses around the world have a shared understanding of how to move towards sustainable business practices. It is clear that this is what those standards evaluated so far do. To take Sustainable Winegrowing Australia (SWA) as an example, central to its organisation is a workbook which all members are expected to use to guide their sustainability activities whether or not they then decide to go on to become formally certified.

## Local relevance



Reviewing standards from very different parts of the world has reinforced the importance of having locally-developed standards in preference to a single, global standard. The attraction of a global standard is self-evident – there would be a single, clear, transparent set of criteria to be applied the world over. If such a global standard were in place, there would be no need for a benchmarking process like this.

However, what such a global framework would lose is the huge level of geographically-specific information and insight such as is contained in the standards we have reviewed to date. CCSW includes incredible detail about the different pests prevalent in different parts of California, and how these might best be addressed. IPW is able to advise on how to address the presence of leopards in the vineyard. WIETA picks up on details like making sure that workers do not become overly indebted to shops on the vineyard where they work.

This level of detail means both that the specific requirements of standards can be tailored to the particular circumstances of the region, and that information and support provided to vineyards and wineries can be focussed on addressing those circumstances. Water management will be an issue everywhere, but in some places the challenge may be dealing with too much of it, and in other places, too little.

Terroir is central to understanding wine, and it also demonstrates the need for standards dedicated to each terroir. That said, there is a role for SWR in supporting collaboration between standards bodies, and where relevant, to share knowledge between standards covering regions with similar terroirs.

## Audit burden vs inclusivity

It is axiomatic that a robust audit process is essential for the credibility of a certification. Whilst most standards include elements of self-assessment on the part of the wine businesses seeking certification, there comes a point when third-party audit is the only means of credibly demonstrating performance. A key element of our evaluation, therefore, has been to look at the quality and depth of the audit process for each standard, including oversight of the quality and qualifications of the auditors themselves. An audit process can only be robust if the auditors themselves are of good quality.

The challenge with this is to construct an audit process which as well as being credible does not pose too-onerous a burden on the businesses being audited. This burden can be two-fold. First of all there are the costs involved in hiring an external audit firm; and secondly, there is the cost in management time to prepare the paperwork and deal with the audit inspection. We know from other sectors, apparel for example, that sometimes the requirement on producers to be audited to different standards can become extremely time consuming and expensive.

All of the standards bodies we spoke with recognise this tension. Some acknowledged that the audit burden means that some smaller wineries will never consider becoming certified. Two also observed that many of these smaller firms predominantly sell locally, and so demonstrating international best practice is simply not relevant.

## Providing support

Although our meetings with the standards organisations were initially intended as a means of discussing with them the issues we had identified in the scope and governance of their standards, in practice, they also served to provide a great deal more insight into how the bodies operate on a day-to-day basis, and the ways in which they engage with businesses certified to their standard, or seeking to do so.

In every case, albeit in different ways, the standards bodies provide quite significant help to wine businesses in their sustainability journey. Fair 'n' Green, for example, visit their wine businesses every year to help them prioritise actions and to develop operational plans for sustainability. SWNZ are currently working with their members to support them in developing fresh water farm plans, and have a series of webinars to provide guidance on this. Both SWA and CCSW provide access to considerable guidance and access to reference documents.

This way of working ends up as a mix between acting as a consultant, and providing a second-party audit. However, the result is that businesses are better set up to perform better when the third-party audit happens, and more likely to pass that audit. From the stories that a number of the standards bodies told us, this approach means that more smaller wineries and growers are able to get themselves certified. It also demonstrates an aspect of the standards process invisible in the written documentation.

We have also seen examples of where a standards body provides support in ensuring the costs involved with auditing do not prevent smaller wineries from becoming certified. Integrated Production of Wine (IPW) in South Africa operates a system under which audits are paid for by IPW itself from the membership fees paid by members. Since larger members pay larger fees, they are in effect subsidising the audit cost for smaller companies. This is a model others may wish to consider.



## Continuous improvement

It is a mantra of almost all sustainability standards, not just those in wine, that they want to see companies engaged on a process of continuous improvement. To a large extent, this makes perfect sense. Sustainability encompasses a wide range of actions, across a spectrum of different topics. No organisation can work on all fronts at once, and so performance and good practice can only be put in place over time.

In all of the standards reviewed, a key focus was on planning and prioritisation, so that wine businesses had a multi-year plan to improve their sustainability performance continuously, and in a structured fashion.

However, the challenge is that continuous improvement gets harder over time. With sustainability, there will be some tasks which can be undertaken relatively straightforwardly, and so in the early stages of a sustainability programme, progress can be rapid. As those easier tasks are completed, and the tougher ones remain, then the rate of progress slows.

This potentially leads to the anomaly that a vineyard already performing well, but with only marginal improvement over the past year might find itself threatened with losing certification whereas a vineyard performing less well, but with a higher rate of improvement can remain.

In practice, most of the standards bodies recognise that when a wine business is scoring in the region of 80% or more then this is a business which has internalised good practice and prioritisation, and can be seen as a leader in sustainability

## Continuous improvement of standards: *expanding scope*

Continual improvement also needs to include engagement with new sustainability issues as they arise. As the GRF states, sustainability is a journey not an end point. To that end it is most encouraging to see a number of the standards expanding the scope of their standard to include new topics, in particular the packaging and logistics.

Historically, most standards have focussed almost exclusively on practice in the vineyard and winery, so it is exciting that several of those standards evaluated to date are looking further along the supply chain. CCSW, for example are planning major new criteria related to packaging and logistics as part of a climate change project. It is also gratifying to see SWR's own work is informing the development of the scope of standards: Equalitas is now requiring certifying companies to adhere to SWR's Bottle Weight Accord.

Over time, ongoing SWR work, such as the bottle miles project and the packaging formats choice tool, as well as work by SWR members and others can be used to inform the continued expansion of the issues that standards cover. We eventually need to reach the point where the whole supply chain is informed by relevant standards, so that we can genuinely say that we are moving in the direction of sustainable wine in all areas.

## Addressing labour rights violations

Although, as we observe in a number of the evaluations, labour rights issues remain an area where standards need to do more. That said, it is pleasing that all those we have spoken to are at least prepared to talk about these issues, and to recognise their importance. We are hopeful that, over time, standards will be as robust in relation to these issues as they already are on environmental topics.

However, during some discussions, a potential anomaly emerged—if a company certified to a standard raises a labour rights issue, there is a risk that they might lose their certification. In theory, this might deter companies from raising these issues, so brushing awareness of potential problems under the carpet. We want those who spot challenges to raise them as they are likely to be systemic, and therefore the only way they can be addressed is collectively.

There is not a clear answer to how to address this issue, however this is a challenge to the process of certification which it is important to bring to the surface so that SWR and its members can work out what best practice should look like.

## Auditors and labour rights

In our conversations both with SWA and CCSW, the point was made that they felt it was out of scope for auditors to address labour rights issues. How, they asked can auditors properly assess what labour challenges might exist, and how can they ascertain whether a plan to address these things is implemented in practice?

It is certainly the case that auditing labour practices is different from auditing performance on environmental topics. Best practice on labour audits – as demonstrated by WIETA – requires for example interviews with workers. This is certainly a different skills-set than, for example, reviewing a carbon emissions plan. Over time, therefore, as coverage of labour issues by standards improves, it will be necessary to ensure that those audit firms used have the capability to address these issues as well as environmental and governance ones.

In the shorter term though, what can easily be done is to ensure that an audit includes checks on the paper trail of the the most significant labour issues:

- **Whether through direct or indirect hiring, are the IDs of workers checked to ensure that they are legally permitted to work and not under age?**
- **Are payments to workers made to named, individual bank accounts, are rates of pay legally compliant, and are deductions legitimate and explained?**
- **Is accommodation provided of acceptable quality?**

In the case of the first two of these, verification should be possible through a review of relevant documentation, and would be no different than, for example, verifying that the spraying undertaken in the vineyard met mandated standards. The last could be achieved by random visits to accommodation. Of course, this is not a sufficient process for properly verifying these issues, but it is a necessary and practical first step that could easily be taken by all standards bodies



## Structuring a standard

One of the challenges in this benchmarking process has been to read and digest standards documents which are written in very different ways. There is no set process for designing a standard and creating the documents to set out that and other relevant information. This point is important, not just from a stylistic perspective, but because standards documents need both to be accessible if they are to be used and effective, and provide the supporting information and advice to help wine businesses implement best practices.

This makes for a rather different experience in reading the documents. Standards like CCSW and Equalitas have quite hefty tomes that can be intimidating, but in fact contain huge amounts of supporting information as well as details of the standard's requirements themselves. FAIR'N GREEN, by contrast is a much slimmer document which is very easy to understand. Yet having read CCSW and Equalitas before, and understood the importance of the wider guidance, we were concerned that perhaps a 'slimmed down' approach risked not providing enough support to those certifying to the standard.

In fact, standards documents – and indeed their supporting websites, contain information of different – broadly three – types. There is the core information setting out the requirements of the standard, and the level of performance required to become certified. Secondly, is a wealth of supporting information giving guidance on what best practice looks like and how to achieve it. And thirdly there are links to external websites and organisations which can support wine businesses on their journey to sustainability.

With the standards that have been in place for many years, there is also a tendency for revisions to be built into an existing document. This can mean that the current requirements are not always very clear by contrast with a document written from scratch.

The documents we felt were most accessible were those of SWA, and this is probably because the standard is held by a professional standards management organisation, Freshcare. The SWA standard is one of a number of agricultural standard designed and operated by Freshcare, so they have experience in making them both clear and informative. The main document sets out the requirements of the standard, and hyperlinks take you to other pages providing advice, and in the direction of other supporting information and organisations.







The full version of this report, complete with evaluations on each standard, is available exclusively to SWR members.

### Sustainable Wine Roundtable

[www.swroundtable.org](http://www.swroundtable.org)

[info@swroundtable.org](mailto:info@swroundtable.org)

---

#### CONTACT:

Dr. Peter Stanbury

*Research Director*

[peter@swroundtable.org](mailto:peter@swroundtable.org)

Delaney Sheridan

*Operations Manager*

[delaney@swroundtable.org](mailto:delaney@swroundtable.org)

