

FAQs

How did we get here?

An industry committee of over 40 growers, vintners and marketers met many times for thoughtful discussion and research regarding sustainability in 2019 acknowledging that the wine industry, and the marketplace, was rapidly changing. Based on their recommendation, the industry at large determined its readiness to develop a statewide winegrape sustainability certification program. In 2021, the Washington Winegrowers worked with the industry to build a winegrape certification program, rooted in the industry's existing Vinewise®\Winerywise™ program. Sustainable WA launched in early 2022.

But aren't we already sustainable?

While it is clear to us that Washington wine is sustainable by nature, the marketplace demands credibility in claims of sustainability. Certification bolsters Washington wine by making a bold statement to the global wine community and to consumers that Washington is committed to sustainable agriculture.

Why create a new program?

We didn't build a certified sustainable wine grape program from scratch—we were already 80% there. Vinewise® was developed by the industry over 20 years ago and was intentionally crafted to be scalable for certification.



What are the benefits?

A certified label will help sell more Washington wine and protect the Washington brand.

A statewide “Washington-specific” sustainable wine grape certification program can bring a return-on-investment for the entire industry including:

Market differentiation

Washington brand value increases and is globally recognized for future decades; better reception of Washington wine in marketplace, appealing to new consumer base.

Credibility

Third-party certification accrediting Washington wine grape grower's sustainability efforts; credibly communicate to consumers, trade, and peers; stamp of approval on Washington wine bottles; brings transparency to growing and production processes; investment in assurance.

Authenticity

This is grassroots; industry built the program based on national and regional input for education; drives continuous improvement.

Responsibility

Ensures the well-being of Washington's vineyards, wineries, people, planet, and prosperity for the long-term.

Is this program certifying vineyards only?

Currently, the program certifies vineyards with plans to add wineries in the near future.

What standards does Sustainable WA use for certification?

The Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard is the official name of the standards required for certification and the backbone of the program, organized into nine chapters and 83 requirements. In 2021, the certification program was built by SureHarvest, a leader in sustainability standards, and ensured the program to be in overall compliance with international standards requirements, including ISEAL Credibility Principles. The Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard is a rigorously vetted set of sustainability best practices in Washington's viticulture industry. The Governance Council oversees and monitors these standards and uses the subject matter expertise of the technical committee to thoroughly review the standards annually to: ensure compliance; address shifts in pest and disease pressure; address technical issues; and ensure they continue to be aligned with cutting-edge research and sustainability best practices. The Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard includes requirements for vineyards and chain of custody.

You can review the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard [here](#).



What are the minimum requirements for certification?

The Standard requires participants complete a self-assessment, meet a set of 18 mandatory requirements and achieve at least 70% for each nine chapters and report on four quantitative metrics. Learn more about the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard [here](#).

Learn more about the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard [here](#).

Once I'm certified, how do I get to market my vineyard as a Sustainable WA certified vineyard?

See the Sustainable WA claims and label use brand guidelines [here](#).

I'm a winery that purchased Sustainable WA certified winegrapes. How can I market this on my wine?

Check out the Sustainable WA claims and label use brand guidelines [here](#).



Why is only a 70% needed for certification, not 100%?

Sustainable WA is committed to the principle of continuous improvement. As part of the commitment, the program will be reviewed on a regular basis to identify areas and requirements that can be revised and improved based on updates in scientific research, growing techniques, as well as market and consumer expectations. In its 2022 inauguration, 70% is used to establish an industry baseline aligning with international sustainability standards. As the program grows and evolves, the Governance Council can make changes to the requirements for certification. Vineyards certified by Sustainable WA must renew for certification annually. Renewal certification is based solely on a participant's successful completion of the entire certification process and maintaining conformance with the current Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard on an ongoing basis.

What areas are addressed by certified Sustainable WA vineyards?

Sustainable WA focuses on establishing a supply of sustainably grown winegrapes based on third-party audits of winegrape growers' vineyard and workforce management practices. The specific scope of the third-party audit is determined by the grower application submitted, which may include all or only some of their vineyards.

The integrity of the sustainability claim associated with the certified winegrapes is reviewed in the supply chain using a third-party chain of custody audit for wineries. The chain of custody audit is only applicable for wineries seeking to make claims using the Sustainable WA Certified Program logo and brand on wines, websites or printed materials. The chain of custody requirements for certified winegrapes are included in the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard.

The vineyard **Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard** is adapted from Vinewise® and consists of 9 chapters and 83 requirements:

- 1 **Business Practices and Risk Management** (business plan)
- 2 **Human Resources** (workplace policies, worker training, compensation and benefits, working conditions, PPE)
- 3 **Vineyard Establishment and Acquisition** (site selection, nematodes, planting material, irrigation)
- 4 **Viticulture** (canopy management, field grafting, harvest, research)
- 5 **Water Management** (water quality and management strategy)
- 6 **Soil Management** (soil management plan)
- 7 **Pest Management** (pest management plans)
- 8 **Materials Handling** (pesticide usage)
- 9 **Whole Farm Ecosystem and Community** (land conversion, neighbor relations, community involvement)

Does the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard take into consideration the treatment of workers?

Worker interviews are part of onsite audits in order to evaluate conformance with different aspects of the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard, including occupational health and safety, wages and benefits, pesticide handling, and other relevant requirements. Worker interviews are a routine part of third-party Sustainable WA audits and strengthen the validity of audit findings. Worker interview protocols dictate they should be done in a way that provides a level of confidentiality related to the specific information workers share during the process. Auditors will have proficiency or fluency in Spanish – or have a translator available –for worker interviews. For a smaller workforce (10 or less workers), a minimum of three interviews will be conducted. For a larger workforce (60 or more workers) a maximum of nine interviews will be conducted.

Who can participate in the program?

Vineyards must be in the state of Washington or in one of the four cross-border American Viticultural Areas including Oregon and Idaho.



What are the certification requirements?

Certified Sustainable WA vineyards must complete an annual self-assessment of vineyard best practices using the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard and meet the 18 requirements for certification, verified during third-party audit.

What are examples of sustainable practice requirements?

A few examples of sustainable best practice requirements for Sustainable WA certification include:

- All workers trained to use personal protective equipment (PPE) and in accident prevention and emergency plans and procedures based on legal and regulatory requirements.
- Compliance with state and federal laws and regulations related to recruitment and hiring, and discrimination due to age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, and country of origin.
- Pesticide selection based on registration for use on winegrapes, worker safety, severity of pest problem, and susceptibility of pest to the pesticide.
- Individuals responsible for pesticide recommendations, application, mixing and handling, exhibit awareness of specific risk associated with pesticides used and has reviewed WW Watch List.

You can review the full Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard [here](#).

Does every program participant receive certification?

Certification is not guaranteed. The decision to certify is based on the program participant's conformance with all program requirements, including verification of meeting the required scoring threshold per the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard Minimum Requirements. Program participants will be notified by the Program Administrator that they have been certified and certificates will be provided.

Certification may not be granted in some circumstance, which include the following:

- Failure to meet the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard Minimum Requirements;
- Failure to complete corrective actions to address non-conformities by the deadlines;
- If, during the time in between audits, the program participant is found to no longer be compliant with the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard; and,
- If, at any time during the audit and certification process, the program participant submits incomplete, misleading or false information.

If a participant is denied certification, the certifier and Program Administrator provide a written justification.

How do I participate in the program?

You must apply for the program. The program application available on sustainablewa.com includes general applicant information, vineyard operation information, and other details that support audit scoping.

The initial application process for first-time or returning program participants is structured to begin in February of each calendar year. This timing aligns with the approach to grower completion of self-assessments documenting vineyard and workforce management practices for the previous crop year, which provides a basis for the third-party audit. Following the initial application, participants will submit a new application once every three years to confirm the scope of the onsite audit and to provide for an increase or decrease in acreage and vineyard blocks enrolled in the program.

The Program Administrator reviews submitted applications and once confirmed as complete, and all fees paid, the application is forwarded to the certifier.



What are Sustainable WA program fees?

Please note that program fees cover certification.

Onboarding application fee: \$500

Acreage fee: \$10/acre

Annual program fee:

First-time growers

- Less than 50 acres: \$750
- 50-200 acres: \$1,500
- 201-1,000 acres: \$2,250
- More than 1,000 acres: \$3,000

Returning/renewing growers

- Less than 50 acres: \$500
- 50-200 acres: \$1,000
- 201-1,000 acres: \$1,500
- More than 1,000 acres: \$2,000



What is the auditing process?

An annual third-party audit is required for initial certification in the Sustainable WA program. Certifiers assign qualified auditors to conduct third-party audits. The Sustainable WA annual audit process typically involves six steps:



* Methods used varies based on audit type (onsite/offsite)

Am I audited every year?

The Sustainable WA program operates on a three-year third-party audit cycle with a combination of onsite and desk audits carried out annually. The cycle starts with an onsite audit in the first year and includes offsite audits in the next two years, with the onsite audit process starting again in the fourth year.

For more information on the audit, please see the Sustainable WA Program Manual.

Who runs the program?

The program was built as a partnership, and will remain a partnership.

- Washington Winegrowers is the managing entity and oversees the third-party audit and certification process related to the Sustainable WA Winegrape Standard.
- The Washington State Wine Commission manages the brand and marketing.
- The Washington Wine Industry Foundation processes funds raised and seeks additional funding through grants and industry, as needed.
- The Washington Wine Institute communicates industry commitment to sustainability with policymakers.

Is there a governing body for Sustainable WA?

A Governance Council oversees the program and will monitor program components including the standards, the auditor training module, the certification program manual, and the application form and claims guidance. The Governance Council includes a representative from the Washington State Wine Commission, Washington Wine Institute, Washington Wine Industry Foundation, the Washington Winegrowers, and an open position.

The Governance Council may form relevant committees as need arises. A Technical Committee will be responsible for decisions relating to program requirements and process, and a marketing and communications committee may be formed to support ongoing outreach and program design. The Technical Committee is populated with subject matter experts to review standards annually to: ensure compliance; address shifts in pest and disease pressure; address technical issues; and overall ensure they continue to be aligned with cutting-edge research and sustainability best practices.

As a program of the Washington Winegrowers, the Winegrowers board of directors has final authority and discretion over program elements.



More Questions?

Washington Winegrowers

Vicky Scharlau,

Executive Director, Washington Winegrowers
vicky@wawinegrowers.org

Katlyn Slone

Program Manager, Washington Winegrowers
katlyn@wawinegrowers.org

Washington Wine Commission

Melissa Hansen

Research Program Director, Washington State Wine Commission
mhansen@washingtonwine.org

Heather Bradshaw

Communications Director, Washington State Wine Commission
hbradshaw@washingtonwine.org