NAPA VALLEY GRAPEGROWERS BEST PRACTICES

- FARM PLANS -

Prepared by the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Industry Issues Committee

A farm management plan is a written summary articulating farm management strategies to meet a farmer’s goals while protecting water quality, natural resources and the operation’s economic viability.

One of the most common planning tools we use as farmers is a budget, a forecast of the anticipated financial costs for the coming vintage. But what happens when a budget plan does not match the vagaries of a vintage or we need to modify our farming practices in order to comply with specific regulations? Just as crucial as a budget, or perhaps of even greater importance, is a written Farm Plan giving vision to the multiple influences that impact our farming decisions now and in the future.

A farm management plan is a dynamic document that catalogs best practices for any number of variables affecting the farm system.

In this case a Farm Plan is used to inventory a farm’s resources such as its crops, soil, water, and its surrounding environment, as well as regulating factors, to farm sustainably while reducing polluting inputs whenever possible. It involves attention to detail and continuous improvement in all areas of a farming business. Done well, a Farm Plan is an integral tool to help define farm management decisions. Going through the planning process increases the chances of success and can help avoid costly mistakes.

Soil conservation and improvement is one of the highest priorities in the adoption of a Farm Plan. Good soil management helps maintain yields, crop quality and profit while reducing environmental risks such as soil damage resulting from run off and erosion. A Farm Plan is usually written in sections and does not have to follow a specific order.

A Farm Plan serves as a reference for outlining regulatory compliance, management of labor strategies, and is required for organic and sustainability certifications.

Common topics addressed by a Farm Plan are the strategies to address variables within a vintage. For example, how will we react to a vintage that is unusually wet or dry? How does one adjust for a vintage that includes high pest pressure or conversely one that has little pest pressure? How will a farm comply with pending regulations such as the General Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR)? All organic and sustainability certifications require a Farm Plan.

Envision the future and make a map of how to get there.

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All planning is an exercise in envisioning the future. By going through the exercise of developing a farm management plan the farm operator is setting the stage for success. There are numerous web sites offering Farm Plan templates and certification programs (a small sampling is included below). A successful Farm Plan provides insight into the best alternatives to changing growing conditions and to complying with regulations, while laying a foundation from which one can monitor progress. Again, a Farm Plan is an essential tool for any type of sustainable certification.

In general, key principles of a viticultural Farm Plan include:

- A commitment to good land husbandry
- An inventory of farm resources both natural and man-made
- Efficient soil conservation and appropriate management of the vineyard floor and avenues to prevent runoff and erosion
- A thoughtful approach to canopy management and the use of crop protection chemicals and fertilizers
- Careful choice of cover crops
- Maintenance of the natural landscape and the enhancement of wildlife borders
- Reference to county and state regulations that impact farming operations

Within each of the above categories:

- Identify Key Issues - Ascertain weaknesses and strengths
- Set Specific Goals - Identify unique goals with regard to cultural practices and ecology
- Create Action Plans - Make deliberate use of available resources to achieve goals and improvements
- Plan to Monitor - Evaluate and revise a plan on an annual basis to quantitatively and qualitatively fulfill goals

Writing a Farm Plan is a creative process that will help maximize management efficiency and effectiveness.

Small farms face serious challenges in our complex and dynamic environment, and making a Farm Plan helps to identify strengths and weaknesses. Beginning the Farm Planning process can seem daunting, but by working on it in bite sized pieces they are relatively easy. Farm Plans serve as an important reference points for planning and are essential to achieving sustainability certifications. An individual Farm Plan helps to ensure the health of the individual farm, and collectively they make the farming community part of the solution in addressing the many challenges facing our agricultural region. A Farm Plan is a living document and should be revisited regularly. The end of harvest is a perfect time to begin a Farm Plan or to review existing Farm Plans. Over the years a Farm Plan can be refined...just don’t forget about it and let it gather dust.

A short list of farm planning resources:

Growing Farms: Successful Whole Farm Management Planning Book:
The excellent starting point in developing a customized Farm Plan
http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/growing_farms_workbook.pdf
Developing a Farm Business Plan: https://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/small-farm-funding-resources#DBP

California Sustainable Winegrowing Program: http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.org/

Fish Friendly Farming: http://www.fishfriendlyfarming.org/

Land Smart: http://landsmart.org/programs-services/landsmart-plans/

Napa Green: https://napagreen.org/

www.napagrowers.org
To Preserve and Promote Napa Valley’s World-Class Vineyards