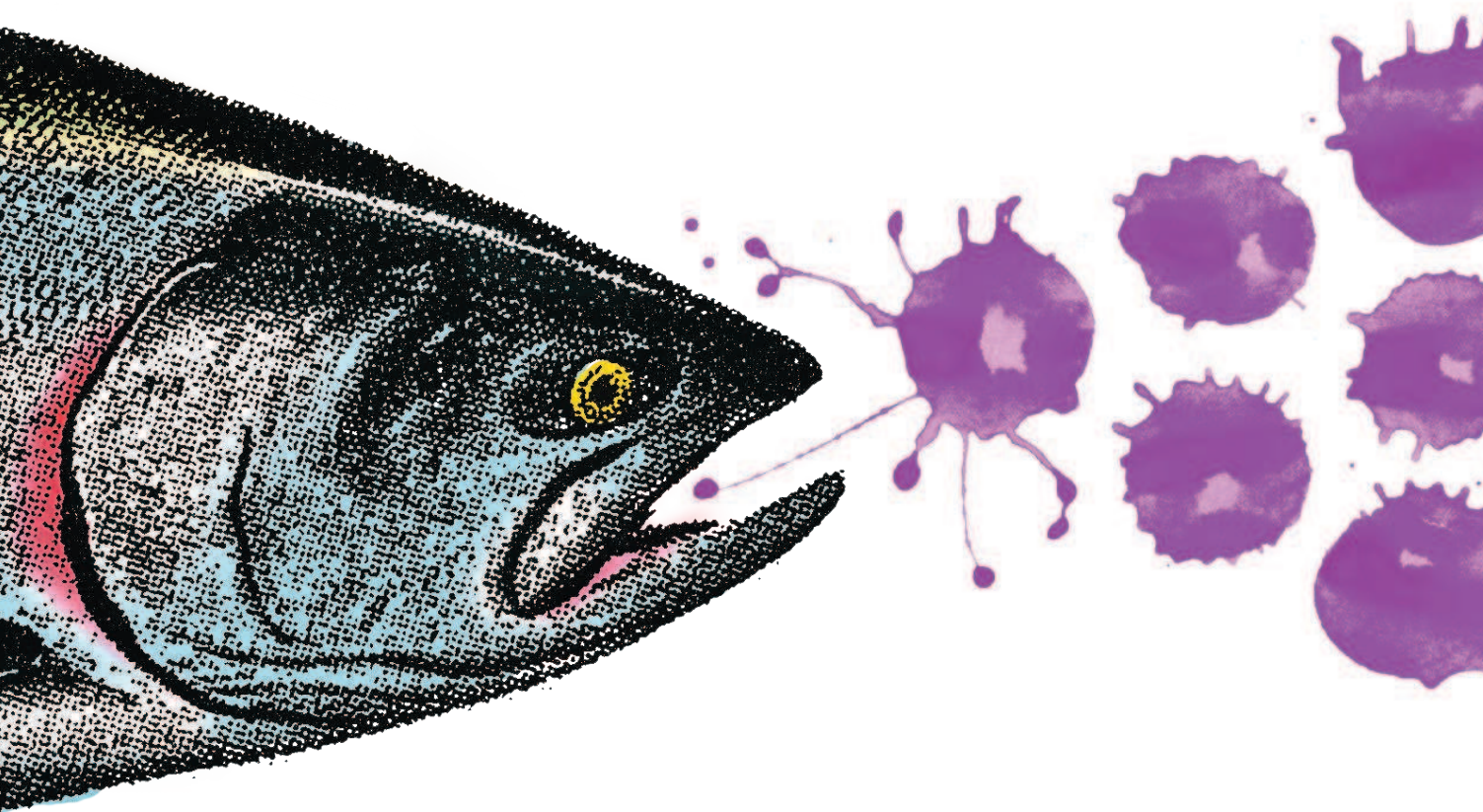




Fish-Friendly Flow

From King Estate to Pfeiffer Vineyards, sustainable practices in Lane County winemaking

BY AMY SCHNEIDER

A logo with two salmon on your wine bottle doesn't mean the wine pairs well with salmon — it means the wine came from a vineyard certified salmon-safe. Vineyards in the Willamette Valley can have an impact on the water quality of nearby streams, but salmon-safe vineyards go through an extensive certification process that ensures winemakers preserve riparian areas, protect water quality and prevent erosion.

Being sustainable isn't always as straightforward as it seems, and some local vineyards still practice forms of sustainable agriculture without going through the certification process.

About half of the wine-grape acreage in the Willamette Valley is certified salmon-safe, says Dan Kent of Salmon Safe, Inc., a Portland-based nonprofit that works with organizations such as Oregon Tilth and Low Input Viticulture and Enology (LIVE) to encourage sustainable winemaking practices.

Of Lane County's wineries, three names are listed online as salmon-safe: Noble Estate Winery, Territorial Vineyards and King Estate Winery.

"In general, we're trying to promote sustainable agriculture and production," says Ray Nuclo, director of viticulture for King Estate. "We're also certified organic, so most of the things we're doing for that made us within the criteria salmon-safe was requiring."

Nuclo says King Estate keeps soil out of waterways and grows cover crops to maintain soil and prevent erosion along stream banks. He adds that another important element of making King Estate salmon-safe is to keep riparian areas undeveloped and monitor spraying of pesticides.

Pfeiffer Vineyards in Junction City is one of many vineyards in Lane County that doesn't have salmon-safe certification. Danuta Pfeiffer, co-owner of Pfeiffer Vineyards, explains that there are certain tradeoffs associated with being labeled sustainable.

For example, she says, in order to be carbon-neutral, a vineyard might stop using tractors and shift to maintaining the vineyard by hand. Instead of tractors, the vineyard would hire workers, and often the only way to get out to the vineyard is by car.

"They end up using more carbon to come to work than you would see from using a tractor," Pfeiffer says. "You can have your certification, and that's all well and good, but what have you traded off?"

Pfeiffer says that her vineyard is fertilized with fish emulsion, and mildew is controlled with Dove soap. The vineyard plants clover between rows to feed nitrogen back into the soil, and Pfeiffer says that her vineyard is the only solar-power-operated winery and estate in the south Willamette Valley.

"You can be sustainable but then you can't be carbon neutral, or you can be carbon neutral but not sustainable," Pfeiffer says. "It all depends on what badge you want to wear for your vineyard. So what we do here is try to do the best we can and have the lowest impact possible, and that is really all you can do."

Kent of Salmon Safe, Inc., says the actual certification costs around \$100, but the cost to a vineyard to qualify as salmon-safe differs from vineyard to vineyard. ❖