

Going green

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Back in 2006, Marlborough's Grove Mill became the world's first carbon neutral winery.

Since then more wineries have been counting their carbons both here and internationally, with a further six New Zealand wineries cementing their environmental credentials through accreditation to the country's carboNZero scheme.

In these environmentally sensitive times, wineries wishing to cleanse themselves of their carbon footprint have to calculate their total climate-damaging carbon emissions, reduce them where possible, then balance any remaining emissions, often through purchasing a carbon offset. Then if they want to claim they're carbon neutral, this must be verified through an official organisation, such as carboNZero.

Most of our carboNZero wineries entered in the scheme having already employed a high level of environmental practices that they wanted to build on and be credited for. However, accreditation has forced all to up the ante, especially in the recording of their power emissions.

As well as the more obvious areas requiring reduction, such as the use of fossil fuels and electricity, many found it was packaging that packed a major carbon punch, which meant switching to lighter bottles.

Despite all the effort required, for Shane Hammond at Dry River, it's a win-win situation: "We can reduce our running costs, while trying to understand our company impact, and for the consumer we are attempting to do our bit on reducing environmental impact on their world."

To date, Grove Mill, Dry River, Kaimira Estate, Huia, Wairau River, Cape Campbell, and Yealands Estate are treading this particular green path. However, there are a variety of alternative environmental approaches that wineries can adopt to salve their eco conscience.

Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand (SWNZ) is the most widely subscribed scheme. However, it seems many wine drinkers are still confused over what this form of "sustainability" stands for, with carbon neutrality perhaps a more easily understandable concept.

"There is no way of knowing exactly what the SWNZ scheme means and what it measures," says Wairau River's Lindsay Parkinson.

"However, if you are certified carbon neutral there are clear guidelines and rules governing what this is and the word neutral means zero: there can be no confusion about that!"

Organics is another option, with some in this camp critical of carbon neutrality. "Organics is the single biggest thing that a farmer can do to help combat global warming", says Colin Ross, estate manager at organic winery, Seresin, pointing out that the increased soil biology at the heart of organics can give an organic farm up to three times the amount of carbon found in a hardwood forest. "It's quicker than planting trees, and better than buying carbon credits."

"Achieving carbon neutrality through purchasing carbon credits is a very dubious piece of morality in our opinion," says Nigel Greening fellow organic estate, Felton Road. "I'm not saying it's always wrong, but the goal has to be to save the stuff in the first place, not to assuage your guilt by buying what may not be worth the carbon it is printed on."

While Grove Mill's Dave Pearce admits that to some it may appear akin to paying a speeding fine, he explains it's currently impossible to be carbon neutral without a degree of mitigation. "The most important part is getting our carbon footprint down," he says.

And like a number of carbon neutral wineries, Grove Mill is also exploring organics and is part of the SWNZ scheme.

Having used its clean, green image to sell its products, which often have to be shipped halfway around the globe to reach their key markets, New Zealand's wine industry certainly needs robust programmes like carboNZero in place. This should ensure it's not seen to be resting on its clean, green laurels. [The New Zealand Herald](#)