



MARIMAR ESTATE

TORRES FAMILY VINEYARDS

ORGANIC FARMING IN OUR VINEYARD

Sebastopol, California — April 2003 marked the conversion to all organic farming methods at Marimar Estate's 60-acre Don Miguel Vineyard in Russian River Valley, the fruit source for the Estate's Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs.

"We started to experiment in 2000 with a few blocks of vines before making the jump to the entire vineyard," says winery founder Marimar Torres. "The whole idea is to create an ideal balance between the vines and nature. The vineyard will be ecologically healthier, and the grapes a higher quality. That's our long-term reward." Organic certification was obtained in May 2006.

Marimar believes conversion to organic farming practices is better for the life of the vineyard in the long term. "The old idea was that a vineyard had to be clean and bare with no weeds. But today, for the overall health of the vineyard, we want to promote the growth of cover crops," she says. The Don Miguel Vineyard's cover crops are a mixture of peas, vetch, oats and clover – some of them edible greens with edible flowers. "Cover crops are essential for organic farming because they provide a habitat for beneficial insects, such as lady bugs and spiders, which are natural predators for harmful pests like leaf hoppers and mites," adds Torres.

Cover crops also help winegrowers manage the vigor of grapevines. In areas where vine vigor is weak, tilling or spading incorporates oxygen and nutrients into the soil. In the vigorous areas, cover crops can be mowed to help devitalize the soil.

Organic farming can also diminish water use in the vineyard. "Cover crops improve soil conditions and help retain moisture," she states. To avoid using herbicides, the winery is also creating a "carpet" of clover under the rows of grapevines that competes with unwanted weeds. Another benefit of cover crops is erosion control.

Recycling waste in an efficient manner, the winery is creating its own compost to use in the vineyard. The mixture of grape pomace, cow and horse manure from Marimar Estate Stables, and green waste is turned and actively decomposed for use as a natural fertilizer. Both the cover crops and compost replenish the soil without the use of synthetic materials. Organic materials are also used as protection against mildew, botrytis and phomopsis. And last but not least, a further benefit of organic farming is that it eliminates the workers' exposure to chemicals and herbicides.

Marimar notes that changing to organic farming methods is a huge shift in the way to grow vines. "It takes a lot to change your whole way of thinking," she says. "Yet everyone here is excited about it because we have already seen the results in the wines. They are rounder, with more finesse – they stand alone, showing better their personality and the *terroir* they come from."

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THE PINK AND WHITE FLOWERS OF THE MIRANDA AND MAGNESS PEAS ALTERNATE WITH THE PURPLE AND BLUE VETCH FLOWERS AND THE WHITE MUSTARD IN THE COLORFUL COVER CROP. THIS PROVIDES A HABITAT FOR BENEFICIAL INSECTS, SUCH AS LADY BUGS (BELOW) AND TINY SPIDERS, WHICH ARE NATURAL PREDATORS FOR HARMFUL PESTS LIKE LEAF HOPPERS AND MITES.

