

Cakebread Cellars Expands Sustainability through Green Team

By Chris Benz

Cakebread Cellars has had a longstanding commitment to sustainability. In 2008, when it became a Napa Green-certified winery, Bruce and Dennis Cakebread dressed up as the Jolly Green Giant (Bruce) and a bush (Dennis) to make the announcement to their employees. They have always believed that combining good humor with commitment is a winning approach.

“This gesture made a lasting impact on all of us,” recounted Cynthia Sharp, Cakebread’s office manager.

Shortly thereafter, a Green Team was formed, focused on researching and recommending ways to reduce energy consumption, water use, and waste. Team members participate in meetings, field trips, and community activities. The results have been stunning.

“I really didn’t have sustainability as a focus until I started working at Cakebread in 2003,” Sharp said, explaining her participation on the team. “But the family has always been committed to stewardship – it drives so much of what we do in the vineyard and the winery. Now, it’s a passion of mine, too.”

A Green Team field trip to UC Davis to learn about pollinators led to an initiative to do more to support native pollinators. Now, the large organic vegetable garden, which provides produce for Cakebread’s culinary program, is certified as Bee-Friendly, a certification recognizing growers who protect pollinators. Certified farmers must implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM), provide continuous floral blooms, offer nesting habitats, and dedicate at least 3% of their land to bee forage. In the vineyards, cover crops and hedgerows provide forage and nesting habitat for diverse pollinators.

Other Green Team initiatives include incorporation of training on Cakebread’s sustainability practices into the onboarding process for new employees, and an expanded focus on recycling.

“The team visited Upper Valley Disposal Service’s facility to learn about proper recycling,” Sharp said. “We also have them come to the winery to give trainings, because recycling practices keep changing.”

Training on waste reduction and proper recycling is held annually in both English and Spanish. Mark Hermann, who works in the cellar, performs a quarterly waste audit to make sure employees are recycling correctly.

“Being part of the Green Team is meaningful,” Hermann said, “It shows that we respect, care for, and are mindful not only of our impact on our vineyards and at the winery, but in our community as well. We’re part of something bigger than just making wine. Honestly, it’s exciting. I feel like more people should feel this way regardless of where they live or work. Hopefully, we can lead by example and show how rewarding it will be in the long run.”

This year, the team visited Bonterra Organic Estates to check out their BioFiltro wastewater treatment system, which uses earthworms and microbes to digest up to 99% of organic contaminants, converts process water into clean water for irrigation, and periodically yields high-quality vermicompost (worm castings) for vineyard use.

Facilities Manager and Green Team member, Robert Wallace, is interested in installing a system that will reduce the energy needed to treat wastewater.

“We’ve taken a number of steps to reduce our energy use,” he pointed out, “such as installing variable speed drives on pump motors, using a three-stage air compressor system, and capturing waste heat. The BioFiltro system could be a way to upgrade our wastewater system and save energy.”

The team also suggests community projects that all winery staff can participate in, such as planting 150 trees at Cakebread’s Suscol Vineyard property. This year, the winery joined the Adopt-a-Highway program and is now responsible for picking up trash and planting flowers along Zinfandel Lane from Highway 29 to the Silverado Trail.

“Our first clean-up was on Earth Day,” Sharp explained. “The whole company participated, and people were really excited about it.”

Lizz Grainger, Enologist, summed up the value of being part of the Green Team.

“Giving back to the community through sustainability is often overlooked but is so important,” she said. “It’s a privilege to work for a company that values the earth and commits to initiatives, such as Napa Cares Adopt a Highway, to preserve our planet for future generations.”

Learn more about Cakebread’s sustainability initiatives:

<https://www.cakebread.com/about/our-practices/>.

Photo credit: Cakebread

Photo caption: Cakebread Cellars Green Team members and company employees clean up Zinfandel Lane. Shown (l. to r.) are Vanessa Saldivar, Zeida Santana, Tammy Toth, Michella Ostrander, Megan Abernethy, Mani Gonzalez, Vanessa Villegas

