



For Sonoma vineyard, transition to organic was easy

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Freeman Vineyard & Winery has long championed environmentally conscious practices. 'We haven't put anything nonorganic on in the last 15 years,' owner Ken Freeman says.

[Tim Hearden](#), Senior Editor, Western Farm Press

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3 Min Read



Akiko and Ken Freeman founded Freeman Vineyard & Winery in 2001 with a focus on cool climate Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley and Sonoma County coast. Freeman Vineyard & Winery

For Ken Freeman, transitioning the two Pinot Noir vineyards at his Freeman Vineyard & Winery in Sebastopol, Calif., to 100% organic wasn't as daunting a task as the conversion process can be for some growers.

Freeman's family has long championed environmentally conscious practices. He and wife Akiko Freeman live on the eight-acre Gloria vineyard estate along the Russian River they purchased in 2001, which he said gave him an added interest in caring for the soil.

"It was easy for us," Ken Freeman said of organic certification, which the business just received through the California Certified Organic Farmers. "We haven't put anything nonorganic on in 15 years ... This way (with certification), you can put it on the label and let people know it's been certified."

There's typically a three-year transition period for fields that have been farmed conventionally. During this time, the field must be farmed organically, and crops grown on this land may not be labeled "organic" until the 3-year period is up. Some lands can be certified more quickly if the owner can show that at least three years have passed since prohibited substances were last used on the field, [the USDA explains](#).

For the Freemans, the transition was an effort to get more premium pricing.

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"This way you can put it on the label and let people know it's been certified," Freeman told Farm Press. "It costs more money to farm organically ... We just started with the label, so we hope to (gain a premium). We're fortunate because our business is growing."

The intersection of marketing and regenerative practices will be a focus of the [2025 Organic Grower Summit](#), which is offering seminars on navigating the road to certification, how regenerative and organic ag fit together, and unlocking the power of marketing for organic farms.

Presented by Farm Progress, the summit will be held Dec. 3-4 at the Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel and Spa in Monterey, Calif. Register [here](#).

Cool climate Pinot Noir

The Freemans founded their [winery](#) in 2001 with a focus on cool climate Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley and Sonoma County coast. They developed vineyards on the cool western edge of the Russian River's Green Valley appellation.

Today, Freeman's estate vineyards include the Gloria and 16-acre Yu-Ki, both now organic, along with the newly planted nine-acre Ko-fu Vineyard in the Sebastopol Hills, which will enable Freeman to produce 95% estate-grown wines.

When the couple purchased the land for the Yu-Ki vineyard in 2007, they donated 25 acres of old growth redwood forest to the Bodega Land Trust to ensure the trees would never be cut down. That year, Freeman also joined the Sonoma Land Trust board.

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The winery also supports Russian Riverkeeper and donates 5% of the proceeds from its Friends of Freeman wine club to local charities including LandPaths, which sends kids to summer forest camps, according to a [release](#).

The certification comes as Freeman has also changed its packaging to reduce the winery's carbon footprint, switching to lighter-weight glass bottles and eliminating tin capsules from the bottle necks.

"I think it's important to a lot of people," Freeman said. "It's more important to the younger folks."

Freeman said he's been able to keep pricing for 95% of his wines between \$50 and \$85, while many of his competitors are charging \$125 for Pinot.

"It costs more money to farm organically – we all know that," he said. "These pesticides are powerful, and if you use organic ones you have to apply them more often. We're already got inflation pressure and labor pressure. But we're fortunate we can invest in the business, and clearly the market is responding. Clearly the younger folks care about it."

About the Author

[Tim Hearden](#)

Senior Editor, Western Farm Press

Tim Hearden is a more than 35-year veteran of agricultural, government and community journalism. He came to Farm Progress in 2018 after a nine-year stint as the California field reporter for Capital Press, an agribusiness newspaper. He spent 20 years as a reporter for daily newspapers, winning California News Publishing Association awards for reporting on flooding and drought for the Napa Valley Register and Redding Record Searchlight, respectively. He is active in North American Agricultural Journalists, a professional organization.



"I believe publications like Farm Press are the future of news and information media," Hearden said. "People are hungry for thorough, accurate and even-handed reporting from

sources that understand and respect their way of life. Ag media is one of the most vibrant and robust sectors in media, and I'm proud to be a part of it."

A lifelong Californian, Hearden lives in Redding, Calif., with his wife, Sara, a preschool teacher and third-generation Shasta County resident.