



SYMINGTON FAMILY ESTATES

The Symington family has long been dedicated to the preservation of the Douro's delicate ecosystem. The family is the largest vineyard owner in the Douro with 930 hectares. Approximately 160 hectares are 100% Organic and the remainder are farmed under the "Sustainable Agriculture" system. The family will continue to farm by a mixture of both systems while progressively working towards 100% organic Port & Wine production.

Vineyards 100% Minimum Intervention protocol (Protecção Integrada)

All of the family's vineyards are farmed using "Sustainable Agriculture" practices and carried out under a strict protocol of minimum intervention. Any treatment that is not 100% natural is minimized or totally excluded whenever possible. In those years when intervention is imperative to protect the vineyards from pest infestation or mildew (rot) natural mineral treatments are always chosen before other options. The result is that effectively the Symington vineyards are farmed 100% organically 4 or 5 years out of 6.



Natural pest control

Pest Control is done by maintaining the pest level (such as the sharp-shooter) at a sustainable level, ie; a certain amount of damage is accepted. The population is controlled and if it starts to increase it is brought to reign by setting pheromone traps, which reduces the male population to an acceptable and stable level.

Planting cover crops

Cover crops are being planted between the rows of vines that serve a number of purposes. The grasses, Short Growth Barley & Clover grow quicker than invasive weeds and therefore eliminate the need for herbicides. The clover in particular is very rich in nitrogen and therefore substitutes any need for chemical fertilizer. The barley & clover are cut-back a couple of times during the growing season creating mulch and natural organic matter to break-down into the soil. The grasses also protect the soil from winter erosion and in the summer create a small amount of surface shade and therefore substantially reduce the amount of water evaporation from the soil.



A small but significant advantage of the cover crops is that it creates an environment for the bugs and pests to live in rather than in the vine canopy, thereby again significantly reducing the need for any form of intervention. This has also had a significant effect on the wild-life food chain. The bugs are a source of food for the small birds, these in turn are prey for the larger raptor birds such as kites, hawks & buzzards etc, who in turn are prey to eagles. As a result, there has been a significant increase in all bird life since these agricultural practices have been implemented in the vineyards.

Conserving water

Numerous systems of water reuse are deployed in the wineries and managed to reduce the need for new water by approximately 50%. The family is progressively converting all properties to solar heated water both for production use as well as for all washing facilities. All waste water is treated to a virtually drinkable condition before being returned to the environment.



Going Solar

A study is underway to see if it will be possible to convert several of the wineries and the bottling facility to solar energy. This is a longer term project because power storage is still not very efficient but the family is hopeful that it may be able to generate enough energy during daylight hours to make the project worthwhile.

Environmentally friendly stakes

Vineyard stakes (to support the vine trellises) are normally made from farmed wood treated with chemicals so as to reduce or slow down rot. The family is experimenting with new posts made from recycled plastics. Should this experiment work there will be less chemicals in the vineyard environment.