



PLANI ARCHE

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Ethical Agriculture

We have been farming for two generations and have spent long days of work in our vineyards in all seasons. We have seen, and so we know, that behind every elegant bottle, which may be presented in a fancy milieu, there is the hard graft of the vineyard. Sometimes we work on beautiful sunny days, but at times it is extremely cold and muddy. Something which is in total contrast to the hedonistic perspective prevalent these days in the world of wine. This is why we want to give an image of our wine as being intrinsically connected with the soil which produced it and gave it character and body. The soil is not the only element which characterizes the grapes, and consequently the wine. Those who work with the soil and the choices they make influence the quality of the grapes that are produced.

We'd like to talk about our agriculture

Working the soil: There are various reasons for this, one being to control weeds, which would compete with the growth of the vines, and would weaken them. However, weeds are useful as they enrich the soil with organic substances, and are therefore not eradicated, but simply held in check. Another aim is to aerate the soil and break up the hard crust which forms when tractors go over it. We seek a balance, working the soil when necessary and leaving part of the vineyard grassed over, in order to enrich it with organic substances as well as all sorts of insects. It must also be remembered that tractors use fuel and also compact the soil. As a result, we have started using workhorses (for the moment just in part of the vineyard) to reduce this problem.

Grassing and green manure: As already mentioned, other plants, such as "weeds" can compete with the vines, but on the other hand they have beneficial effects, which are not limited to simply enriching the soil with organic substances. Some plants, especially legumes, enrich the soil with nitrogen, fertilizing it naturally, as the nitrogen they yield is more stable than normal fertilizers (especially chemical ones) and are slowly absorbed by the vines. Some of these plants can even take the place of working the land, because their roots move and soften the soil. Some of the best plants for this are of the cruciferous or grass (gramineous) varieties. Of equal importance is the effect these plants have on the quality of the grapes...they can influence their bouquet. Grassing over is a real art, and one of the most natural ways of managing the soil.

Pruning: This is an operation which has one of the greatest influences on wine quality. First of all, we can decide what our grape yield is to be. By deciding how many buds to leave on the vine, we also decide how many bunches of grapes will form and therefore how many grapes will be produced. But with pruning, and above all with the type of cultivation we adopt, we also influence the quality of the grapes and the plants' sensitivity to disease: the cordon system gives more mature and less acidic grapes, but also a denser vegetation, so the bunches are more prone to disease, because they are less ventilated. Guyot, on the other hand, gives a more acidic and fruity grape, and because the vegetation is more open and ventilated, the bunches are less prone to disease. For the most part we choose guyot because with organic cultivation we try and keep diseases in check in the most natural way possible. We also have the advantage of having fresher wines.



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Treatment: In organic cultivation copper and sulphur based fungicides are permitted, as well as the use of bacteria to ward off vine pests or diseases. Over time we have developed a technique which has allowed us to almost halve the number of treatments. As a result, compacting of the soil has been reduced, as has the use of copper, which in any case is a heavy metal and certainly not good for the soil in the long term. We have experimented with compost tea (a bacteria-rich solution) on the leaves, which checks certain diseases. All the research we are carrying out on our land is aimed at enabling the plants to defend themselves against disease, and to decrease the use of tractors in the vineyards

Harvest: Most of the harvesting is done by hand, in crates or trailers according to needs. In cases of emergency we harvest mechanically: when the vines are growing sick and grapes need to be harvested as quickly as possible. However, this does not exceed 20% and we try to resort to this method as little as possible

Tractors: Although these were a huge innovation last century, there is undoubtedly something paradoxical about them nowadays, particularly in the cultivation of certain plants such as vines, which need precision rather than power. A tractor easily weighs two or three tons and at about 100 horsepower, we have found that this is far more than is needed for much of the work that has to be done. On our family concern, problems with the land are greater, because we have a very clay soil, which compacts and becomes rock hard when tractors go over it. Tests have revealed that the soil is compacted between 60 -100 centimetres in depth. Considering that 80% of the roots are in the top 40 centimetres of soil, this is bound to have a detrimental effect on the vines! We don't want to make tractors into monsters- they are wonders of technology that have evolved over more than a century, but we should think about how they are used.

Horses in the vineyard: We introduced workhorses to the vineyard a few years ago, partly for their fascination, and partly because they have advantages over tractors: they cancel out compacting of the soil and have sufficient power to work the surface of the soil, as should be done in the vineyard. Working with horses is not so easy, however. We have grown out of the habit of using them to work in the countryside, and over the past fifty years they have been selected and bred for their beauty or for their meat. As a result many of the best specimens of workhorses have been lost. The most important aspect of this project is to work with these stupendous, but highly sensitive animals. They are wonders of nature, with several million years of evolution. What better reason than that...

And the other animals? In the past we have aroused media curiosity with our use of geese, who clear the vineyard of weeds. We continue to use them in part of the vineyard to carry on with our experiment. They also provide meat and eggs of high quality for us and those who work with us. We are always searching for a balance between man, vineyard and animals

Organic agriculture: We have been certified organic from the start. It has become a way of being for us, regardless of current trends. Nowadays it is one of the forms of agriculture which best supports the demands of modern society: the production of good food, which is as healthy as possible (i.e. without traces of pesticide) and which is produced with respect for the environment. Organic cultivation respects these three principals, even though it is not the only form of cultivation to do so - even a conventional form of agriculture can achieve this, if carried out in a rational way, as long as it respects these principles. Not everyone is sure about what organic agriculture is. There is not the space here to explain the lengthy »



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terms of the European Union, though we can say what the basic principle is: everything used in agriculture must be of an organic nature, or natural, and not synthetic. Fertilizers such as manure, algae or organic waste are permitted, whereas herbicides or chemical fertilizers are not. The regulations are of course more complex than this, and are continually updated, because organic cultivation is naturally something which can always be improved upon, and whose principle aims remain the above-mentioned 3.

Biodynamic Agriculture: is an agricultural model developed by the philosopher Rudolph Steiner. He perfected extremely refined composting techniques, based on the production of useful microorganisms, starting with cow manure matured in the cow's horns: under ground to produce anaerobic bacteria or matured above ground for aerobic bacteria. The technique is rather more complicated and takes advantage of the phases of the moon to use these microorganisms when they are more active, much as our grandparents planted their crops according to the phases of the moon to influence their growth. We have been treating the soil biodynamically for several years now. Our aim is to improve its fertility with this undoubtedly sustainable method - it uses only a few grams of fertilizer per hectare of land.

Our model: We have spoken about both organic and biodynamic cultivation and have to say that they are both somewhat narrow models, if taken individually. What we have developed and what is evolving in our family holding is certainly more complex, because it aims to incorporate the best aspects of different techniques. We are constantly searching for simpler, more natural and more efficient methods. We don't like a dogmatic approach, because as human beings we have to modify the environment that surrounds us to some extent. However, we must also do this in the most sustainable way possible.