

# Viticulture

## Test & Trial – Summary of workshops held in March 2020



Kent Downs AONB Unit

March 2020

# Viticulture: Tests and Trials

The first round of workshops were held in March 2020 with one workshop in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and two virtual workshops in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the South Downs National Park Authority with 39 people present. This included 25 vineyard owners, land managers, farmers, advisers and consultants.

Following introductions, a presentation giving background information about the setting of each of the three landscapes delivered by the protected landscape representative. This was followed by the DEFRA Environmental Land Management (ELM) presentation to give some background information on the new scheme.

Our consultants for the project are Dr Alistair Nesbitt and Paula Nesbitt from Vinescapes who gave a presentation highlighting their area of work and their involvement in the South Downs National Park Authority Viticulture Impact Assessment project. They also gave their initial thoughts on vineyard sustainability which created some discussion. There was much talk about the visual and social impact of vineyards in the landscape. With this came the fact that people were often resistant to changes in the landscape.

The audience were then introduced to the Viticulture: 'Tests and Trials' project giving a brief outline of the objectives and outcomes for the 18 month project outlining the involvement of the participants in 1:1 meetings and group meetings to discuss findings and the development of the final report which will be presented to DEFRA.

Following each presentation discussions took place and some of the points made by participants are summarised below. These are comments from participants and have not been altered. Consequently, some have a slightly conversational tone.:

## **Education and Engagement**

Education and training facilities are a critical issue. Many people want to work in a winery but not on the ground with the management of the vineyards. The workforce is ill equipped to deliver the best practice guidance. We need a skilled labour force where young people are willing to be trained to deliver the ELM benefits in viticulture. Further education could be used to develop the skills across the board for people who want to work in the industry including research. This could be delivered by Plumpton College and other horticultural educational establishments.

It was suggested that the curriculum should perhaps begin to address the knowledge required to work in the viticulture industry with regards to understanding processes such as fermentation. It could be a countryside course either on site or in the classroom with the wine makers. ELM could provide payment for educational access and could be paid by results. This could be an opportunity for 16 to 18-year olds.

Education in vineyards for all ages including underrepresented groups from towns and cities should be encouraged. There should be engagement with the local school as many aspects of the vineyard fits with the national curriculum. It could be a wonderful educational tool from which the school children and adults alike would benefit. Education and access need to be part of best practice, yet there are only a few vineyards with onsite wineries with facilities for the general public.

Farmers seek money from direct sales. This kind of access would not contribute to a public good but providing educational resources would, which may also indirectly have a market reward.

## **Stakeholders and Local Communities**

Do we improve the test and trial by including wider stakeholder perception by the public since there is so much misinformation? What are the local communities and general public looking for? This is a great opportunity to educate and inform parish councils as it could help overcome their misconceptions around viticulture. Some of this work has been undertaken by the South Downs National Park Authority and could be replicated in Kent.

The exemplary management of vineyards could create good neighbours. Interaction with parish councils on the benefits of the vineyard for biodiversity, education, the landscape and access should be encouraged. Many see them as a blot on the landscape rather than distinctive.

Councils have concerns about how visitor numbers will increase – how will they cope with the necessary infrastructure such as car parks yet many vineyards with winery's already have such infrastructure.

There should be encouragement and facilities for underrepresented groups to visit vineyards and learn about biodiversity and wine making through an education programme/walk. The barriers may be lack of transport but many of the vineyards have the required resources such as car parks and conveniences.

## **Access**

There are opportunities to create circular footpaths round the vineyards and farms with biosecurity in mind. This would feed into the access Test and Trial as well.

Open farm vineyard days as part of the Kent Big Weekend could form part of an access ELM. This would be one of the many examples of public good from vineyards such as tours etc. Scale is important – viticulture could create a community interest in the protected landscape. The viticulture tests and trials could involve an 'experience' such as tourism, nature, landscape and ecology.

Many vineyards with wineries are open to the public but often those without wineries do not have any provision for public access. Looking more closely at social integration and access to vineyards maybe there could be collaboration of walking routes across various vineyards within close proximity. This may overcome the need for facilities at each vineyard. Collaboration between vineyards is important – Surrey Hills has a rural enterprise artisan trail; this could be extended to the vineyards or a new wildlife countryside trail created. A vineyard could be a safe place to walk and enjoy the landscape, as well as its health and wellbeing benefits.

## **Environment and Soil Health**

There is an issue with pesticides as the new environmentally friendly products are becoming weaker and not as efficient. Integrated Pest Management both tackles the issue of weaker pesticides as well as delivering environmental benefits and could be supported by ELM.

There needs to be consideration for landscape character whereas now both rabbit and deer fencing are often commonplace. Biodiversity could be enhanced by creating fencing channels required for wildlife movement.

Vineyards have an infrastructure which could make space for nature. Areas within the vineyards should be created for biodiversity such as wildflower plantings, new hedgerows/windbreaks, areas for reptiles and amphibians and cover and corridors for small mammals etc. What are the

indicator species for vineyards? There could be incentives to create a species rich wildflower meadow in and around the vineyard.

Public good - what does it mean? Importantly, public good (if being paid public money) needs to be something that is not driven by the market and that market forces would not otherwise provide. This was recognised as creating some great opportunities within DEFRA's scheme. Public good has been described by DEFRA as protection from and mitigation of hazards, beauty, heritage & engagement, clean and plentiful water, clean air, thriving plants & wildlife and mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Climate change may see the warm year of 2018 being the norm which will require vineyards to adapt through their sustainability protocols.

Air, water and soil are key constituents of the ELM and were addressed when it was recognised that a reduction to spray drift/vapour, increased carbon footprint and foliar feeds were key elements. Nitrate neutrality/larger pollution issues should be addressed under good farming practices including viticulture. Vineyards need to consider Integrated Pest Management and soil carbon mitigation.

Some farms have whole estate plans. Could these be used to link vineyards together through best practice like the facilitation fund in the last countryside stewardship scheme? Schemes round the world such as organic and biodynamic methods etc will flag up possible management ethics, with willingness by growers/producers to establish these as best practice

Landscape character needs to be addressed with consideration to aspect and features in an open rolling landscape such as the South Downs. Collaboration of vineyards on landscape character in a protected landscape should be considered, such as linear features in the landscape to provide landscape permeability. Measures to increase beneficial insects and improve pollination/reduce pests etc is highly likely to be recognised as a public good.

Green crop cover (this could cover wildflower meadows in the restoration of chalk grassland) to enhance soil organic matter which in turn begins to alleviate water runoff and encourage water holding capacity. Infiltration during storm events is also likely to be seen as a public good in terms of groundwater recharge and flood risk reduction, carbon storage and soil biodiversity enhancement.

## **Sustainability Schemes**

There are a number of sustainability schemes such as Wine GB, LEAF and Red Tractor which could act as an entry point to align sustainability with ELM interventions. Payments could be for liabilities and costs of staff etc. The supermarkets are driving these schemes indirectly with their demands. However, this might not be totally sustainable. Vineyards could be managed sustainably through the WineGB sustainability standard. However, groups of farmers need to meet these profiles used for marketing. But how does WineGB compare to LEAF, for best practice? WineGB has done a lot of work – does it go far enough?

It was suggested that advisors were needed for supporting and advising in viticulture sustainability. Improvement going forward could be recognised with a training sustainability scheme – a training scheme to achieve best practice. Advisors could be working with vineyards with the scheme being administered at a local level.

Would participation in LEAF be 'earned recognition' for instance to become part of ELM without further work to establish a new structure.

## **Scheme Administration**

It was suggested that DEFRA should visit to divulge their format, priorities and position as a starting point to ensure the outcomes are on the right line. New information from DEFRA is slowly filtering out with their initial protocols looking very fluid.

Who will be administering the scheme? What are growers required to demonstrate and will there be an audit? These questions are yet to be answered. However, it will be audited since it is public money but DEFRA states there will be a lighter touch when compared to countryside stewardship schemes.

All vineyards should be required to fill in a form to establish the baseline for viticulture sustainability. This could be measured through the current state of the sustainability protocols of WineGB, FWAG and LEAF. Can we influence WineGB with further sustainability ethics?

A code of best practice should be designed which should include environmental issues to implement and the costings. There needs to be an active policy document. This can form the basis of a viticulture-based ELM. Sustainability is a lot of work, so what would a viticulture ELM look like?

Is it possible for WineGB to represent the ELM for public goods to be delivered – access/education/environment? However, if viticulture and top fruit growing together with stone fruit growing were amalgamated this would not work and a different body would be required to represent this ELM.

## **Vineyard Management**

Provision of labour is going to hamper the management of the vineyards with farming requiring 75,000 pickers each year. How is DEFRA going to address this?

Accommodation affordability is another problem with so many new vineyards appearing. Bigger kit (mechanisation) would mean less people to manage the vineyards and ultimately make vineyards more sustainable. It was noted that this may overcome some of the labour problems but not address the carbon footprint. Funding and support for this may appear during the transition alongside ELM development and include capital investment support.

## **Extras Outside Sustainability**

Additional case studies of various vineyards could be undertaken at the end of Milestone 2.

Food can be considered a public good. This was corroborated by many members of the group. Wine brings a large amount of income into the inland revenue and can this be considered a public good. There are questions over the viability of vineyards in the commercial marketplace. At present 35% of production is sold to the general public who visit wineries. How viable is their commercial market? Much of the wine produced in the UK is sparkling which is consumed by the younger generation every week. There is a bigger economic case as ELM will support wider business sustainability.

## **Additional contacts to pursue over the next milestone**

There is an All-Party Parliamentary Viticulture Group chaired by Andrew Griffiths. David Parkinson is CE of WineGB. Chris Foss is the chair of Sustainable Wines Great Britain and WineGB's Environmental Sustainability Workgroup. He has recently retired from Plumpton College.