

RESPONSIBLE SOUTH AFRICA

Many within the country's wine industry
strive to do right for the greater good.

BY LAUREN BUZZEO

There are an array of important issues being examined around the world right now. Conversations surrounding sustainability, labor, community development, equal opportunity and equitable representation are becoming more prominent in nearly every country, culture and profession, and the wine industry is not immune. These discourses can encourage a shared sense of cognizance and ethical duty to positive long-term effect.

While South Africa's social policies and citizen treatment were stained by apartheid, many within the country's wine industry have been committed to social responsibility and development of their communities.

Today, the pursuit of the greater good, especially in business, is not necessarily a given, but it's one that rings louder and truer with each passing moment. Its effects can be real and lasting, and it can help to ensure a viable and valuable wine industry. Ahead, we shine a light on some of the successful strategies employed within South Africa's wine industry.

ALAMY



Early Social Pioneers

Prior to the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, there were almost no opportunities for professional development, advancement or economic stability for people of color in South Africa, who represented the majority of the country's population. The limitation resulted in an imbalanced wine industry that suffered from subpar working conditions as well as labor relations that often featured low wages, discrimination, inadequate housing and little employee support.

Post apartheid, many in the industry sought to right such pronounced historical wrongs, and, while still a work in progress, efforts continue toward improvement.

Initial strategies included a number of Cape wine farms that sought to establish joint ventures with their workers. These programs aimed to address some of the imbalance in land holdings by providing workers with partial ownership in addition to teaching skills like winemaking and winery management.

One pioneer was the Fairvalley Farm Workers Association. Established in 1997 by employees of Fairview Estate with Charles Back, the estate owner, this workers' empowerment initiative sought to provide land ownership to its members and their families. Through a combination of grants from the Department of Land Affairs and the Fairview Trust, the association purchased and developed a roughly 40-acre farm to create a new wine brand called Fairvalley.

Fairvalley's first release, a Chenin Blanc, was launched the following year, and proceeds from its sales were used to build houses for the founding members and their families. Today, more than 60 families are members of the association. They benefit from the land, brand and housing, as well as the employment opportunities those things afford.

Seeking to provide workers with stable homes, Backsberg Wine Estate developed a project called



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tion of the wines, from vineyard to bottle, under the guidance of Owner Michael Back and Backsberg's then-winemaker, and Backsberg managed the marketing and sales on their behalf. Profits from the sale of the wines helped build 18 houses, which were acquired mortgage-free by vineyard workers.

Industry Change Champions

While early pioneers worked to improve conditions on their farms, more formalized efforts were needed to instill awareness and advance socioeconomic change throughout South Africa's winelands.

To that end, the Wine & Agricultural Industry Ethical Trade Association (WIETA) was established in 2002. The nonprofit multi-stakeholder organization of wine cellars, producers, wineries, trade and civil-society unions created an ethical code of conduct to promote respect, dignity and fair treatment that members must adhere to.

Currently, the association has more than 1,500 members, up from only 400 in 2012.

Members are subject to periodic audits—some announced, some not—to ensure compliance with labor, occupational health and safety legislation. The visits also seek to confirm members are maintaining

Clockwise from top left: a bottle of Freedom Road 1998 Sauvignon Blanc, signed by Nelson Mandela; Corlea Fourie, Head of Wine and Viticulture at Bosman Family Vineyards; workers at a WIETA-certified site in Stellenbosch

sustainable ethical policies and practices, housing safety and sanitation, as well as supporting the broader development of community and family life. About 1,000 members are currently WIETA certified.

A WIETA Fair Labour Certification Seal for wine packages was introduced in 2012. The seal signifies that all producers, growers, cellars and bottling facilities that contributed to the production of the wine adhere to the association's ethical standards, policies and procedures.

"Globally, key consideration has been given over the last few years to the way in which global supply chains are having to account for human rights and working conditions in supply chains across the globe," says Linda Lipparoni, CEO of WIETA, through a statement. "Moving forward, 2020 and the next 10 years will be seen as the decade of action on climate change, with leading food and beverage brands aligning their sustainability targets to the [United Nation's] Sustainable Development Goals, climate change targets, consumer sentiment and efforts to support sustainable agriculture and support producer resilience."

In 2009, Fairtrade Label South Africa (FLSA) was also established to promote, protect and advance the rights of farmers, workers and producers in the country.

Supported through the Fairtrade International Central Office since 2017, it seeks to ensure suitable working conditions and labor rights. This includes the ability to join a trade union or collectively negotiate conditions, as well as payment of the Fairtrade Minimum Price, a floor price that buyers must pay producers to cover small wine-grape farmers' average costs of production.

Additionally, a Fairtrade Premium added to the selling price gets put into a communal fund for farmers and workers. These profits can be used however they see fit to improve farm practices, education, healthcare and training programs that benefit them, their families and communities.

Today, South Africa is the largest producer of Fairtrade wine globally, accounting for around two-thirds of Fairtrade wine sales. There are 24 producer organizations involved, encompassing around 70 farms and employing nearly 3,000 workers.

One of the country's first Fairtrade-certified producers was Bosman Family Vineyards. Over the years, the estate has implemented numerous social, economic and environmental practices that promote long-term sustainability and equitable representation. Many of its more than 350 full-time employees represent their family's fifth generation on the farm.

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In 2008, a joint venture between Bosman Family Vineyards and the Adama Workers Trust formed the wine industry's largest Black Economic Empowerment (BEE, the government's post-apartheid affirmative-action program) deal to date. The transaction transferred 26% ownership of the company to the winery and vineyard workers, which included shareholding in the winery, vineyards, vine nursery and more than 1,000 acres of land.

Together, over the last decade, they have grown the business eightfold. The brand has acquired more land, imported new drought-resistant varieties and invested in the marketing and export of their wines.

All in all, initiatives from Bosman Family Vineyards and other Fairtrade-certified progressives Du Toitskloof Wines and Merwida Winery have helped more than 6,200 people. They've also contributed valuable infrastructure, including several schools and libraries, hundreds of farm housing opportunities, a retirement home, community centers that feature social and medical facilities, and both fixed and mobile medical clinics.

"If there is care for the people that do the work, they care for the work they do," says Petrus Bosman, managing director of Bosman Family Vineyards. "You cannot have a good life if part of the community in which you find yourself is excluded from the possibility to progress. Children from our farming communities have opportunities to become everything and anything they would like to."

In October, the Stellenbosch Wine Region adopted a comprehensive code of conduct as the foundation for its own socioeconomic development projects. The guidelines apply to the 150-plus members of the Stellenbosch Wine Routes to ensure they behave in a manner that protects and preserves human rights and dignity.

"Commitment to the Ethical Code of Conduct is for the first time a condition of membership," says Mike Ratcliffe, Stellenbosch Wine Routes's chairman of the board. "Our plan is also to show leadership by open-sourcing our research to all other regions in South Africa and encouraging them to follow us."



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Working on the Workforce

The South African wine industry currently employs more than 160,000 people from historically marginalized groups, and there are numerous initiatives that seek to address the need for a trained, skilled workforce from these demographics.

Wine Training South Africa (WTSA), a nonprofit organization founded in 2005, offers comprehensive training to cellar staff. It runs the SKOP (Afrikaans for Senior Cellar Assistant Training) program, offered since 1987 under the organization's previous name, Eisenburg Cellar Technology Alumni Association (EKOV).

New programs and workshops like a winemaking certificate, management training and mathematical

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literacy project were introduced by WTSA in 2015, in partnership with the Cape Winemakers Guild (CWG).

The CWG is known for aiding various causes that support social development through education and training within the wine industry. Funding is raised via donations and proceeds from the guild's various charity events held throughout the year, and disbursed through the Nedbank Cape Winemakers Guild Development Trust, established in 1999.

The CWG trust focuses on four main projects: the WTSA initiative; Circle of Excellence, a support and mentorship program that gives recognition to cellar workers with special skills; scholarships for oenology and viticulture students; and the CWG's Protégé Programme, which gives aspiring winemakers three-year internships to work alongside members of the guild. Since the Protégé Programme's launch in 2006, 23 recipients have graduated from the program, and 10 are currently participating in their internships.

Practical, hands-on training and experience are also the driving forces behind FELCO's ventures. Through its FELCO Africa office, the manufacturer of commercial pruning and cutting equipment has hosted an annual pruning competition since 2009. The top three pruners from South Africa's various wine regions move on to determine the best pruner in the country. The competition has become so successful that other FELCO delegates gained interest, and an international pruning competition is scheduled to take place in Switzerland this March.

"The competition furthers the excitement of pruning, giving these workers the opportunity to test their skills against other skilled pruners," says Jaco Engellbrecht, viticulturist and founder/owner

FELCO AFRICA

Clockwise from top left: the computer lab at Bovele Community Centre in Wellington; a vineyard worker receives hands-on pruning training from FELCO Africa; Fundraising Manager Charmaine Gola, Deputy Director Marilize Buys, former oral hygienist Melany Abrahams and employee Loryn Esau, all of Pebbles Project

of Visual Viticulture, who often works in partnership with FELCO Africa. "[It] is more than just a very emotional event, it showcases the importance of these workers and gives them a platform to shine, but it also serves as a very important training platform."

FELCO Africa has also partnered with South Africa's Old Vine Project to promote education to better serve and preserve the country's old vines, which require special attention and respect when pruning. The goal is to train every person who prunes a certified old vine in the Western Cape in the next three years.

"We at FELCO Africa [have] decided right from day one that we would like to give recognition to our agri workers and also our viticulturists," says Gys Liebenberg, managing director of FELCO Africa. "The winemakers do get recognition, but the guys doing the pruning and looking after our vineyards are always in the background. To make the life of a worker easier and more productive, we started all the training programs."

Investing in the Future

Although a historical lens helps explain why some in South Africa's winelands are committed to change, it's all done with an eye toward the future. The focus is to care for future generations of farmers, growers and winemakers through education, health and development.

The Cape Wine Auction, South Africa's preeminent wine auction, strives to address such needs. Founded in 2014, all proceeds are disbursed through the Cape Wine Auction Trust to charitable organizations that support education in the country's winelands. The first event raised seven million rand (approximately \$650,000 at the time), which funded four beneficiary organizations. In 2019, the auction brought in over 15 million rand (around \$1 million), which benefitted 28 partners.

A beneficiary from the start has been the Pebbles Project, a key nonprofit organization committed to early childhood education and social development. It helps disadvantaged children and families of farming communities throughout the Western Cape Winelands through services in five areas: education, health, nutrition, community and protection.

Funding income for the Pebbles Project was just over 3.5 million rand in 2013 (around \$325,000), but by 2019, that figure reached over 28 million (approximately \$2 million).

Numerous initiatives seek to address the need for a trained, skilled workforce from historically marginalized groups.

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A Pebbles Project fundraising event at Creation Wines in Hermanus

Since its founding in 2004, Pebbles Project has formed 34 early childhood development centers and 16 after-school clubs. It also offers a range of support programs throughout the wine-producing areas of Citrusdal, Hermanus, Paarl, Somerset West, Stellenbosch and Wellington.

Many wineries and industry organizations partner with the Pebbles Project to help improve local communities. In 2015, Carolyn Martin, co-owner of Creation Wines, approached the Pebbles Project to develop educational facilities for farming

families in Hermanus's Hemel-en-Aarde valley.

Through funding from the Cape Wine Auction Trust, a Rotary International grant and other donations and fundraising initiatives, a combined center for early childhood development and after-school care was opened in January 2017.

"Thanks to the continuous support from Carolyn Martin and the amazing team at Creation Wines, the Pebbles Hemel-en-Aarde Education Project has been able to support close to 80 children living in and around the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley," says

PEBBLES PROJECT AND CREATION WINES



Early childhood education supported by the Indaba Foundation; above: Lubanzi's Charles Brain with students at a Lubanzi-supported Pebbles Project Early Child Development Center and After-School Club

Madelein Snyman, the Pebbles Project Hemel-en-Aarde education project manager. "Not only do they run a variety of fundraising campaigns to support the project financially, but they have also assisted us with forming invaluable partnerships with individual, international, corporate and local donors alike."

In March 2019, Hemel-en-Aarde's government-run school was closed without notice, which displaced 24 students. Shortly after, the Pebbles Project Hemel-en-Aarde facility was registered as an independent education site to accommodate those students and others in the future.

Three months later, the Pebbles Academy opened as a private school for preschool to ninth grade, with children who hail from 39 farms in the region. All materials and resources are provided thanks to rigorous fundraising campaigns and in-kind donations. The academy has 65 students enrolled for 2020, up from the 34 students served upon opening.

The Indaba brand was launched by the wine business Cape Classics in 1996 as a high-quality

LUBANZI WINES, INDABA FOUNDATION

value wine. Initially, a portion of the global sales was allocated to the Indaba Scholarship Fund, which helped children from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa.

This charitable focus has only grown since its inception. Since 2015, a portion of sales proceeds from Indaba wines now goes to the Indaba Foundation, a U.S.-based 501(c)3 nonprofit that provides Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) teacher training with a focus on early childhood development to support children living in South Africa's winelands. The foundation also supplies learning materials and educational infrastructure to established Wineland schools.

In 2016, the foundation launched the Indaba Montessori Institute, an AMI training facility, within The Sustainability Institute of Stellenbosch, South Africa. It's the only facility to offer AMI-accredited training in Southern Africa. By investing in teacher training, Indaba aims to improve early childhood education to benefit sustained personal growth and professional development for previously underserved communities.

Lubanzi Wines is another brand that supports socially conscious programs. Run by the Cape Venture Wine Co., founded by Americans Charles Brain and Walker Brown, Lubanzi produces two responsibly sourced wines made in collaboration with South African winemakers Bruce Jack and Trizanne Barnard.

Pebbles Project is the primary beneficiary of Lubanzi Wines, with 50% of the brand's profits allocated to the organization. Lubanzi is also a certified B-Corp as well as Fairtrade and Fair For Life certified.

"What we can achieve as a small company really pales in comparison to what the whole of the industry can achieve if we all intertwined social responsibility more deeply in the day-to-day," says Brain. "When we have success, we hope it helps influence the way other larger industry actors perceive the value of social responsibility. We think this influence is so important, because ultimately that's how you create significant, lasting change."

"We believe in the power of business to change the world, to change the way consumers think, to shift supply chains toward better balance, especially for those at the beginning of them, to share stories and visions that can remind us that as a collective, we can be an incredible engine for equity, for inclusivity and for justice," says Brown. "I believe in a moral duty to make the world a better place. And I believe that we calibrate that moral compass every day."

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