BRAVIUM

Bees in the Vineyard

In 2022, Bravium added beehives to each of our Anderson Valley vineyards as part of our regenerative organic farming practices. Vines self-pollinate so bees are not necessary for grape production, but they do play an active role in overall vineyard health.

The fungicides and pesticides typically used in traditional farming are harmful to bees, and this widespread practice is in part why bee populations have declined around the world. In regenerative organic farming, however, the bees and vineyard support the health of each other, creating a beneficial cycle.

Bees are a key component of regenerative organic grape growing for a number of reasons. They pollinate ground cover, which improves the organic matter in the soil, benefiting the vineyard's soil health and structure; they pollinate plants that attract beneficial bugs—such as beetles and wasps—that play a critical role in pest control, mitigating the need for pesticides; and they pollinate permanent cover crops, which keep CO2 in the soil and out of the atmosphere, and increase the water-holding capacity of soil.

To see how best to incorporate bees into our vineyards, I brought in beekeeper Frank Killian from Hopland, CA, and we determined that the Anderson Valley vineyards would be ideal sites—for the bees and for us. Hives need to be near a water source, such as a pond or spring, and bees generally only fly when temperatures are above 54 degrees and winds aren't too strong.

We placed 40 hives in each vineyard. Each hive can host 60,000 bees, meaning we have approximately two million bees in each vineyard. The bees forage from their surroundings, but when conditions are too challenging, Frank will provide nectar to sustain them. Just like winemaking, some years are better than others.

What's also exciting is that new research is showing that bees play a role in more aspects of grape growing than we realized, and can be directly beneficial to the vines. We're just starting to understand some of this, including these fascinating facts:

- Bees have been found to help remove a vine's calyptra if it becomes stuck. When the calyptra isn't removed, the vine won't get proper flowering or fruit set, which are needed for even berry size within each cluster.
- With their constant moving and landing, bees help improve the vines' self-fertilization by increasing pollen dispersion, while also picking up and spreading healthy fungi that can inhibit less-desired fungi, such as those causing botrytis or bunch rot.

Our reliance on—and support of—bees doesn't end in our vineyards. To bottle our wines, we exclusively use DIAM Origine corks. These corks incorporate a beeswax emulsion that makes the corks watertight and protects their elasticity. By using these natural cork closures, our bottles retain a uniform oxygen transfer rate, and we support the health and well-being of the bee populations that are key to the production of this cork.

Bees make everything better!