



# GUSBOURNE

SUSTAINABILITY REPORT  
2023

# AT A GLANCE



We're proud to be a founder member of Sustainable Wines of Great Britain.



Our winery energy comes from 99% renewable sources.



We used 72% less water at harvest 2023 compared with harvest 2022.



In spring 2024, we planted 16 varieties of cover crop to improve vineyard biodiversity.



Our vineyards are alive with different species: we count more than 30 different plants on the vineyard floor.



Our biodegradable natural corks sequester carbon dioxide.



We've reduced winery bottling waste to zero.



We provide wildflower forage for two sets of bee hives in our Kent vineyards.



We released our first-ever charity wine bottling in 2023.



At The Nest, we source the majority of our produce locally, working with nine local producers and suppliers in our kitchens.



We maintain 9.2 hectares of ancient woodland.

# WORKING SUSTAINABLY: TODAY AND FOR THE VINTAGES TO COME

At Gusbourne, we work as sustainably as possible – today, and for the vintages to come. We're building a business for the long term, founded on our deep held respect for nature.

We planted our first vines in 2004, and we've been working in a low-intervention way ever since.

But, in the vineyard and beyond, we're always looking for ways to do things better.

We're fortunate to control our processes from grape to glass: we grow, craft and sell everything ourselves. This means we can deliver change and make progress towards environmental goals in a significant way.

There's balance built into our business: we own and operate our own winery; equally, we carefully manage and maintain all our own vineyard and estate land. Our

land sequesters carbon, offsetting a percentage of the carbon emissions we produce.

We also control the sales and distribution of our wine; this level of end-to-end control is exceptionally unusual in wine production – and it means we take responsibility for our environmental impact throughout our business.

We know there's more to do and, within the next three years, we're committed to measuring, understanding and reducing our carbon footprint beyond the winery and vineyards.

We're proud to be a founder member of Sustainable Wines of Great Britain. In our most recent vineyard audit, we received Gold accreditation for our work in managing our vineyards sustainably, protecting our soil, conserving the environment, promoting biodiversity and minimising the vineyard carbon footprint.

# IN THE WINERY

We're proud to be a founder member of Sustainable Wines of Great Britain. In our most recent vineyard audit, we received Gold accreditation for our work in managing our vineyards sustainably, protecting our soil, conserving the environment, promoting biodiversity and minimising the vineyard carbon footprint.



## WATER

We recently introduced water metres to ensure we can measure and control all our winery water use. This means we can quickly identify and address any problems, such as leaks. It also gives us good data to identify and monitor high-demand periods in the year, such as bottling, filtration and harvest.

Thanks to the introduction of a steamer to sanitise our winemaking equipment, we've been able to dramatically reduce the volume of water used and eliminate the use of chemicals in cleaning tanks. We used 72% less water at harvest 2023 compared with harvest 2022.

## ENERGY

As of January 2024, all our winery energy comes from 99% renewable sources. We're working hard to reduce the amount of energy used, for example, we've changed our lighting to low-power, sensor-operated LED lightbulbs throughout the winery.

## WASTE

### BOTTLING

We identified bottling as one of the principal sources of winery waste. We now recycle 100% of our plastic, carbon and wood at bottling.

### MARC

In previous vintages, we sent our marc - the leftover stems, pips and skins from wine production - to be recycled. We are currently trialling composting marc ourselves. This is an area where we hope to find an innovative solution in the future: our marc is a nutrient- rich resource which could be better used.

### GREY WATER

Our used water is collected and removed from the winery so that it doesn't enter local water courses; we're currently researching on-site solutions which would mean we can recycle our water for use on the estate in the summer.





# IN THE VINEYARD

In both Kent and Sussex, our approach in the vineyards is low-impact, regenerative agriculture.

## **REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE**

Through winter, our Sussex and Kent vineyards host flocks of Romney and South Downs sheep. This livestock help keep weeds in check, reducing the need for tractors in the vineyards and therefore reducing soil compaction. The sheep also fertilise the land, returning the nutrients they take to the soil.

## **SOIL HEALTH**

We've mapped the soil structure throughout our vineyards. We use this data, plus three-yearly soil analysis, to ensure we're supplying nutrients to the soil in the right locations and the correct quantity.

## **SOIL STABILITY**

Over the past five years, we've experimented with tractor mounted cultivators (roll hacks) to reduce weed competition in the under-vine area. The benefit is less need for herbicide, but the cost is compacted soil and disrupted microbiome. This has led to loss of vigour

in the vines. In 2023, we began a no-till way of working under the vines to ensure that the topsoil remains intact, allowing the humus to develop a stable structure. In turn, this will regulate the microbes working in the soil and help protect the moisture levels.

## **HERBICIDES**

The no-till approach means that we treat a small under-vine area with herbicide to prevent under-vine competition from weeds. This application is done as sparingly as possible and only in carefully monitored conditions. In time, we hope under vine cover crop planting will remove the need for herbicide.

## **FERTILISER**

We work with natural fertilisers in addition to the nutrients provided by the sheep over winter. These comprise composts, seaweed fertiliser and composted chicken manure which help improve soil health and biological diversity.

IMAGE CREDIT MARK COCKSEGE/RYEZINE



### **MANUAL WORK**

The majority of our vineyard work, from pruning to harvest, is done by hand which reduces the need for vehicles in the vineyard. Using people, not machines, promotes soil health and ensures we have eyes on our vines throughout the year, looking for any quality or health issues.

### **BIODIVERSITY**

Vineyards are usually a monoculture. This means it's extra important for us to encourage and nurture biodiversity wherever possible across the rest of the estate. In Kent, we have significant acreage of historic woodlands, which we carefully manage and support. We encourage biodiversity in the vineyard headlands and in uncultivated spaces. Of particular interest in Kent is a wild bank at the top of Boot Hill, which is home to a huge variety of wildlife. For several years, we tried to seed a wildflower meadow in Boot Hill vineyard, but the increasing dominance of Sow Thistle meant we

needed to look for another option. We've now adopted more formal but varied horticultural planting around our Boot Hill vines (see page 15 for more information on this).

In Sussex, the headlands and cover crops are now only mowed two to three times a year. Allowing the under canopy to grow to flower means our insect population has started to boom, with very high numbers of dragonflies, lace wings, spiders and ladybirds and all manner of soil life. In the past two years, we've seen huge numbers of butterflies in the vineyard, from Gate Keepers to Red Admirals.

The alternating height of our cover crop rows has encouraged owls into the vineyard to hunt at night; they like having long grass next to shorter open areas. We have seen an increase in all three UK owl species in recent years. In spring 2024, we started a project to building and locate bird boxes around the estate; we look forward to seeing which birds come and nest over the next season.

The increased insect life also supports a summer colony of swallows and house martins. At harvest, the birds follow the harvest team as they work through the fields, flushing small insects into the air. They feed on these to fatten up before flying off for winter.

### **COVER CROPS**

In Sussex, we routinely re-seed our cover crops throughout the vineyards. Cover crops benefit our bees and insects (they provide a variety of pollen and nectar sources), as well as our soil. We aim to have a mixture of plant types, with varied root depth. This helps fix nitrogen in the soil and prevents soil compaction which is problematic for vine vigour. Species we sow in Sussex include: salad burnet, ribgrass, sheep's parsley, yarrow, Italian ryegrass, mustard, fodder radish, tillage radish (which is useful for its deep strong tap root which helps de-compact and aerate the soil), six different clovers, trefoil and self heal.

In Kent, we're currently involved in an extended Innovate UK trial looking into the potential of cover crops. We believe cover crops between the vine rows have an important role to play in maintaining and improving the health of our soils and the biodiversity of our vineyards, and this project is all about collecting the data to prove it.

In spring 2024, we sowed spring beans in alternate rows using our direct drill (this means there is no need for herbicide or cultivation prior to planting as the seed is placed under the existing sward and will grow through it). These will grow through the summer creating biomass and fixing nitrogen.

In August, we'll then sow a herbal ley which includes 18 species such as ryegrass, meadow fescue, creeping red fescue and timothy. The beans work as a good soil conditioner, reducing the competitive nature of the existing grass sward and adding nitrogen.

### **LEAF-PLUCKING**

We remove leaves around bunches to increase airflow and sunlight. This result is a more open and ventilated bunch zone, which reduces the potential for fungal infection. It also helps the fruit ripen.

### **GREEN HARVESTS**

We green harvest to promote airflow and reduce botrytis, as well as lead to earlier ripening and less vine stress. This also means the vines have more time to recover through photosynthesis before shutting down for winter; healthier plants are better able to withstand diseases without as much intervention the following year.

### **POST-HARVEST FRUIT DROPPING**

In vintages where some fruit has been slow to ripen, we'll remove it at harvest rather than leave it on the vine. This helps conserve the vine's energy, allowing the post-harvest photosynthesis to focus on root and trunk repair and growth before winter shutdown.

### **BEE HIVES**

Healthy and happy pollinators are essential to maintaining our local flora and fauna. We host an apiary on the farm on behalf of The London Honey Company. The London Honey Company only house their bees on farmland where they're confident in a varied and safe diet for their bees. You can read more about their commitment to sustainability [here](#).

### **RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

We are one of the key members of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) viticulture R&D consortium based in East Malling. We believe we have an important role to play – contributing to research projects and knowledge sharing amongst the wine-producing community.



# PACKAGING AND TRANSPORT

## CARDBOARD OUTER BOXES

We've been working hard to make changes to our product packaging. Packaging is essential to ensure our products arrive in pristine condition, looking smart and appealing, but we want to minimise waste wherever possible.

We now use fully recyclable cardboard outer packaging and recyclable tape to close our boxes.

## GIFT PACKAGING AND PRINT

Our new cardboard gift packaging is fully recyclable. We have now made our gift packaging optional at checkout, so customers receive it only when it is wanted.

We print our dispatch notes on wildflower seed paper, which can be planted at home.

All our printed materials are printed on FSC certified paper and are fully recyclable. We expressly avoid the use of foils which can be problematic in the

recycling process, working instead with a B-corp, FoilCo whose foils are re-pulpable. Our magazine, Vini-culture, is printed on FSC approved paper.

## CORKS AND CLOSURES

We use a number of different bottle closures depending on the wine style and blend. In environmental terms, natural cork is a good news story. (One hectare of cork forest draws down 15 tonnes of CO2 a year. In contrast, a screwcap generates 25 times more CO2.) The majority of our corks are made by DIAM; you can find out more about DIAM's sustainable practices [here](#). Natural Amorim cork, used in our Agrafe wine are biodegradable and sequester carbon dioxide. You can find out more about Amorim's impressive commitment to sustainability [here](#). Our Vinolok stoppers, used in our English Rosé, are fully recyclable. You can read more [here](#).

## GLASS BOTTLES

The wine industry – and most especially the sparkling wine industry – faces a huge challenge when it comes to reducing the carbon footprint of glass bottles. Coloured glass bottles can be made using recycled glass (cullet). At present, our supplier uses 73.3% cullet in its production of coloured glass. You can find out more about their commitment to CSR [here](#).

We are currently trialling lighter still wine bottles and hope to have good news to share in vintage 2025. All our glass bottles are sourced from suppliers who follow best practice when it comes to sustainability. But we're not complacent. We have an important role to play here in pushing our suppliers to prioritise ways to lower their impact.





# AT THE CELLAR DOOR

## SEASONAL PLANTING

Our team of gardeners work hard to ensure our hospitality spaces are alive with colour and interest year-round, even in the off-season months. Planting schemes are chosen with considerations such as: resilience when faced with our coastal winds and clay soils; plants which can be propagated on site; local or indigenous plants; plants to attract pollinators and provide year-round habitat.

Our landscape team use our green waste and cardboard to create our own compost on-site; we also produce our own nettle-based liquid fertiliser for the landscape planting.

## TREE PLANTING AND MANAGEMENT

We've planted trees across the estate, including fruit trees and an arboretum of native species such as Silver Birch. We were fortunate enough to be included in the Sakura cherry tree project - an initiative to promote a new era of UK-Japan friendship. We now have a small, beautiful cherry tree orchard adjacent to our Boot Hill Vineyard, which visitors can walk through and enjoy on our self-guided

tour. While paths are mown to allow guests to wander around the arboretum, we also maintain long-grass wildlife corridors to provide cover and shelter.

One part of ancient woodland we manage is called Butness Wood, which is home to an array of flora and fauna, including wild boar. Where damaged trees have had to be removed from Butness, we've used the timber to create log-pile habitat for species such as slowworms, adders and stoats.

## LOCALLY SOURCED PRODUCE

Our brilliant kitchen team work hard to source as much produce as possible locally, from Rye Bay seafood to Romney Marsh lamb. We work closely with nine local producers and suppliers of local produce to ensure we use the best-possible meat, fresh fish landed at Hastings, local vegetables, artisan bread and more. Our commitment is to source the majority of our produce from within 65 miles of Appledore.

In The Nest, you'll find our toiletries are also locally produced. Our wool blankets - available for guest use - are made for us by Romney Marsh Wools.



# THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

## COMMUNITY

Throughout our history, we've supported a huge variety of local and wine industry charities with Gusbourne wines and experiences for fundraising events.

More recently, Mary Bridges, our Head Winemaker, championed a new initiative, producing a Winemakers' Edition Pinot Meunier 2022 bottling in support of The Drinks Trust.

In spring 2024, a new social and community committee was formed with staff from around the business. Its aim is to promote and find ways in which we can support and work with our local community.

## LOCAL WORKERS

Harvest time sees around 170 seasonal staff at work across our Sussex and Kent sites. Increasingly, we recruit within our local areas rather than bringing in workers. Now, most of our workers return year on year to take part in the Gusbourne harvest.



# OUR TEAM

We're incredibly lucky to have a team of people who work hard, look after each other and care about Gusbourne. We think it's essential that, in return, the business cares for every team member too.

We want people to have rewarding careers with us; this means saying thank you for long service, celebrating success and developing people's professional skills, for example with WSET training. It also means paying fairly for a job well done.

We want people to feel happy and healthy working with us, so we have a wellbeing programme with The Drinks Trust Business Advisory Programme, as well as offering private health insurance and a cycle to work scheme.

We want everyone who works at Gusbourne to feel part of the family - welcome, included and connected. Team socials, team wine tasting and knowledge sharing opportunities are just a few initiatives which help.

But you can't write a policy that makes a business feel like a family: it comes down to people - to a team who are in it for the long-haul, who love what they do, who are pulling in the same direction and who want to build something for all the vintages to come.



KENARDINGTON ROAD  
APPLEDORE, KENT, TN26 2BE  
ENGLAND  
+44 (0)1233 758666

**GUSBOURNE.COM**