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Naturally, these wines offer outstanding taste
Jill A. Ditmire

Organic is good. But for some California wineries that are trading technology for tradition, biodynamic farming is better.

In essence, they're making Mother Nature the general manager of the winery.

Simplicity is the guide, but getting there takes some effort. The Europeans have been doing it successfully for years.

Environmentally sound and ecologically friendly, biodynamic farming follows a back-to-basics technique that appreciates every living element that contributes to the farm (plant, animal, soil, water, astronomy, geography). It also means finding ways to use and reuse those ingredients to make an outstanding product. In other words, nurture nature and get good grape.

At Ceago Vinegarden in Mendocino County, Calif., chickens replace chemicals. A feathered flock eats the bad bugs and hungry cutworms that threaten to kill the vines and grapes. Eggs from those birds feed the farm workers. Waste from the birds fertilizes the farm.

Every now and then, I'm sure a vineyard grubbing chicken becomes dinner. And I'd pair it with any of the Ceago Vinegarden wines.

Selections

Ceago Vinegarden Merlot, \$33. Deep, rich, opulent red wine. Intense nose of fresh cherries, cocoa and soft eucalyptus. Supple, silky, balanced bright flavors of bing cherry, ripe plum, soft eucalyptus. A terrific example of how California merlot should taste. Serve with beef tenderloin, lamb, grilled burgers or steak.

2001 Ceago Vinegarden Cabernet Sauvignon, \$34. Delicious, dry, full-bodied red wine. Lush and inviting aromas and flavors of fresh black cherries, dark chocolate, blackberry pie, mint, tarragon, lemongrass and lavender. Full, rich, balanced, silky with flavors that linger. Delicious.

2003 Ceago Vinegarden Sauvignon Blanc "Katherine's Vineyard," \$15. Tasty, tangy, dry white wine. Perfect match for spring/summer foods -- grilled, chilled or freshly picked from ground, bush or tree. Deliciously balanced, this wine offers fresh flavors and subtle silky lingering finish.

2003 Ceago Vinegarden Chardonnay, \$15. Crisp, fresh, fruity dry white wine. Fresh aromas and silky flavors of honeysuckle, golden delicious apple, Bartlett pear, minerals and wet stone mid palate. Lingers with crisp fresh fruit. Good with grilled chicken, fish, sushi.

2002 Jeriko Estate Syrah, \$23. Another Mendocino County biodynamic producer. This dry, earthy red wine offers aromas and flavors of black berries and spice.

2001 Jeriko Estate Pinot Noir, \$23. A biodynamic take on the most popular red grape on the market. Earthy, dry red wine with aromas and flavors of currant, soft strawberry.

2001 Jeriko Estate Chardonnay, \$20. Medium-bodied dry white. Aromas and flavors of butterscotch, soft

tropical fruit, vanilla, toasty oak.

Shopping guide

Crown Liquors , 8125 E. U.S. 36, Avon, (317) 272-9463; Deano's Vino , 1043 Virginia Ave., (317) 972-8466; Hamilton Beverage , 2290 E. 116th St., Carmel, (317) 844-0872; Kahn's Marketplace , 313 E. Carmel Drive, Carmel, (317) 817-9473.

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