

SMALL WINERY STRATEGIC PLAN

February 2026 - Oded Shakked

You must all know how bad the current times are for small wineries. Not only are we losing older customers to normal attrition and Ozempic, we have a hard time getting Millennials to try wines that are not Orange or Pink. I am here to let you know that because of this, we decided here at Longboard Vineyards to do NOTHING about it.

That's right. Nothing. Nada. Zilch.

While our neighbors are rebranding as "regenerative biodynamic stewards of the earth" and installing Instagram walls in their tasting rooms, we're over here doing the same thing we've done since 1998: growing grapes, making wine, and occasionally remembering to update our website.

We have a Strategic Inaction Plan (SIP):

We've watched the consultant parade march through Sonoma Wine Country. They arrive in Teslas with a bumper sticker claiming "I didn't know Elon was crazy", clutching PowerPoints about "activating the Gen Z love for authentic wine experiences" and "leveraging sustainability narratives for brand differentiation." They leave wineries \$15,000 poorer and convinced that what we really need is a podcast, a wine club called "The Coven," and packaging that looks like it was designed by the same person who does oat milk cartons. We considered their advice carefully. Then we went back to farming.

What We're NOT Doing

We are not putting our wine in cans. Our wine comes in bottles. Glass ones. With corks and sometimes either a foil or a wax dip. I know, positively Paleolithic. But here's the thing: we already bought a shared bottling line in 2005, and Larry from maintenance says it's got another 30 years in it. Larry has never been wrong about machinery. He was wrong about his daughter's boyfriend, but never about machinery.

We are not making orange wine. We make red wine and white wine and sparkling wine. The red wine is red. The white wine is white, sometimes with a golden hue. The sparkling wine goes through second fermentation in the bottle. We're farmers, not Crayola.

We are not carbon neutral. We're also not carbon positive, carbon negative, or carbon agnostic. We drive a 1967 Ford tractor that runs on spite and stubbornness, and we know how to file the points on the distributor rotor. Could we replace it with an electric self-driving tractor? Sure. Will we? Ask Larry. (See above re: machinery.)

We are not hosting sound baths, goat yoga, or "sunset meditation experiences in the vineyard." We do have a dog named Diesel who chases bungs in the barrel room. You can meditate near him if you want, but he's not participating and neither are we.

Our Sustainability Story

Since everyone needs a sustainability story, here's ours: We have slowly changed how we farm because we are cheap, it comes with the territory of doing something for love, not money. We've been dry-farming because, just like raising my kids, I want my vines to experience struggle, you want water? Grow deep roots. Not because we're heroes of water conservation.

We compost because we've always composted. Farmers don't like throwing stuff away. We have chickens because they eat the bad bugs and we love scrambled eggs with foraged mushrooms for breakfast. We don't spray much because spraying costs money and requires expensive equipment. Our carbon footprint is low mainly because we can't afford to fly anywhere.

Is this regenerative agriculture? Biodynamic? Organic? I don't know. We never filled out the paperwork. The certification people want \$5,000 a year and honestly, that's a new bladder press membrane and six really nice lunches at Taqueria Guadalajara.

What We're Selling

Here's what we have: less than 5,000 cases of wine that taste like where we live. Syrah that tastes like Syrah. Sauvignon Blanc that tastes like Sauvignon Blanc. Pinot Noir that looks and tastes like Pinot Noir. No apologies, no QR codes linking to our "brand journey," no limited edition collaboration with a Pilates pants designer.

The Millennial Question

"But what about Millennials?" everyone asks, as if they're a separate species requiring special pheromones and TikTok dances.

Here's what we've noticed: Some Millennials like our wine. Some don't. Exactly like Boomers. And Gen X. And soon Generation Alpha. And that one Gen Z kid who came through last month and bought two mixed cases because, and I quote, "It tastes good and isn't trying to be my friend."

We have a wine club. It's called the Wine Club. Members get wine two or four times a year. We email them when it's coming and give them time to change the selections to their palate and pocket book. That's it. No gamification, no points system, no exclusive merch drops. Just wine showing up at your door like some kind of ancient prophesy fulfilled. Members come to parties and dinners and pig roasts in the vineyard.

Sometimes they fly in from really far away. We know the names of our wine club member's kids, sometimes we remember the names of heir pets.

The Future

Will we survive? Maybe. Maybe not. The wine industry has real problems, over-supply, consolidation, over regulation and taxation, three-tier distribution nightmares, changing consumer habits, climate change actually affecting our harvests. To name a few.

But we figure if we're going down, we're going down doing what we love and know how to do. Growing grapes. Making wine. Selling it to people who want it.

No pivots. No disruption. No growth hacking. No KPI's to "Move The Needle"
Just farming.

If that's not enough, well, at least we didn't spend our last \$50,000 on dealcoholizing a perfectly yummy wine just so we can add twelve other ingredients to it to make it quaffable.

Larry and the 1967 tractor will see you in the vineyard. Bring sunscreen. We're not carbon neutral, but we're definitely UV positive.

Longboard Vineyards: Still here. Still boring. Still making wine that tastes like wine.

