Transformations of farming systems: the potential of guideline-based sustainability programs

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Overview
My research aimed to identify success factors and barriers hindering sustainability program adoption. I focused specifically on the development of the ‘Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand’ program (SWNZ), a pro-active approach managed by the national industry body ‘New Zealand Winegrowers.’

Methods
21 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with NZ wine industry stakeholders and experts. Sample: people who are or were actively involved in developing SWNZ.

Some topics covered by the interview:
- Past changes in the industry
- The rationale behind the development of SWNZ
- Interviewee’s definition of sustainability
- The impacts of SWNZ
- Future challenges for SWNZ

The NZ wine industry today
With a twenty year history of sustainability programmes and more than 94% of the winegrowing area certified by either ‘Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand’ (SWNZ), or ‘Organic’/‘Biodynamic’, the NZ wine industry is an important example of how sustainable production might be organised at the level of industry groups.

In agriculture, such changes might be challenged by the fragmented ownership of land by multiple farm enterprises with distinct economic situations, goals, practices and values.

Transitions toward a sustainable society need changes at large spatial scales.

For example, different producers use benchmarking for different goals:
- **Competitive producers** wish to be better than all others to remain a step ahead and demonstrate their ability to innovate or be efficient.
- **Risk-averse producers** wish to be better than average to indicate that they are managing risks by doing the ‘right’ things.
- **Improvement-guided producers** wish to compare their performance to others to learn where they most need to improve.

The sustainability program benefits growers and winemakers differently depending upon such factors as such the operation size, the grower status (contract or independent grower), the company strategy…

The mind-set of the producer also influences how SWNZ benefits them.

“Protection of the New Zealand wine industry is about having accountability and continuing to evolve” - Marlborough winemaker