



LEADER of the pack

Having celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, Tuscan and Piedmont wine producer Banfi has set itself a number of goals for the future

THE MAIN focus for the future, says Banfi CEO, Cristina Mariani-May, will be on sustainability. “One of my personal goals is to leave the land in a better state than how I inherited it,” she says.

When Banfi established itself in Brunello, there were only a few dozen wine producers in the area, and, according to Mariani-May, it was “one of

the poorest hilltop towns in the country.”

Now, with more than 250 wine producers in the region, Banfi can be credited with being one of the businesses that provided the momentum for change. Banfi manages 3,125 hectares in Tuscany and Piedmont, exporting its wines to 86 countries, with a turnover of €72 million (£61.5m) in 2018.

With issues surrounding climate change becoming increasingly topical, caring for the land is, understandably, high on its list of priorities.

Mariani-May says: “Our first 40 years were spent learning about the land and Tuscany, as pioneers, researchers, and innovators. All of our discoveries and knowledge were shared with our

neighbours in Montalcino, and many of our initiatives have been reproduced by others with great success. This pleases us, because one of our goals has been to help lift the quality of the area and Italian wine.

“Now, we want to continue the momentum of Brunello and also give back to the land. We began Castello Banfi as a sustainable estate before anyone knew what the term meant, ensuring a balanced, replenishing ecosystem through biodiversity and responsible practices. We’re always looking for ways that we can be even more sustainable as a company, both to keep our estate and wines healthy, and also to minimise our impact on the planet.”

Some of the changes that Banfi has implemented include the use of lightweight glass bottles, which has made an environmental impact equal to taking 3,600 cars off the road. Since 2015, the winery has put together a sustainability report based on requirements of the G4 Global Reporting Initiative.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

As a result of its sustainable practices and leadership in customer satisfaction and social responsibility, in 2006 Banfi became the first winery in the world to attain ISO 14001, ISO 9001 and SA 8000 certification.

In recognition of her leadership in the field, Mariani-May was invited to speak at the Climate Leadership in Porto this month. Discussing the challenges faced by the wine industry because of climate change, Mariani-May and other guest speakers, which included keynote speaker and former US vice-president Al Gore, encouraged the sector to work together to reduce their collective environmental impact.

Closer to home, Mariani-May is especially proud of Banfi’s clonal research work. Having partnered

with the University of Milan and professor Attilio Scienza, the winery identified 650 clones of Sangiovese growing on its estate and in the surrounding area.

“Of those, we planted 180 in an experimental vineyard and micro-vinified them for study purposes, which eventually led to a final selection of 15 ‘super’ clones that represent the best

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characteristics of the grape,” says Mariani-May. “As of 1992, all new plantings of Sangiovese on our estate are a mix of at least three or four selected clones that are complementary to one other, chosen for the individual characteristics of the soils and the terroir in each vineyard site.”

As a result of the estate’s work in this field, Mariani-May is confident about the future of Brunello. She believes that while quality should remain high, the wines produced in the region should always remain accessible and affordable to wine lovers.

“That is something we have always believed at Castello Banfi – that the beauty of Brunello should be shared with the world, so that people have a wonderful wine to drink but also to entice them to visit Montalcino, where the wine, the food, the landscape,



Banfi CEO, Cristina Mariani-May

and the people are beautiful and unique,” she says.

Banfi has recently released the 2014 vintage of its Poggio alle Mura Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, which will be available to try at Vinitaly in Verona. The wine is aged in 30% large French oak casks, ranging in size from 60 hectolitres to 90hl, and 70% in 350-litre French oak barriques. It is described as “elegant and balanced with good persistence, and complex, sweet aromas”, and is said to pair particularly well with dishes like braised wild boar.