

NEU DIRECTION SAM'S CLUB® INTRODUCES THEIR OWN FAIR TRADE WINE

Nicole Aloni

Sam's Club is proud to announce the introduction of Neu Direction—its first Fair Trade Certified wine—in November 2008. Neu Direction, a Sam's Club Exclusive, is one of only a handful of wines to receive this certification in the inaugural year of the groundbreaking Fair Trade wine certification program.

Neu Direction is 100% Malbec from the renowned winegrowing region of Mendoza in Argentina. It is a classic Malbec*—medium-bodied, fruit forward, with moderate tannins and ripe flavors of plum and cherry accented by a touch of chocolate. As a result, this is an extremely food-friendly red wine that complements dishes with pork, lamb, duck, turkey, beef—even salmon.

According to Dex McCreary, Sam's Club Senior Director of Beer, Wine and Spirits, "Neu Direction came about because we have an ongoing directive at Sam's Club to make responsible sourcing on all products an absolute priority. This means looking for Fair Trade products, organic products and working toward sustainable packaging and recycling standards with our suppliers."

"We are conscious of the effect that our business can have; we know that our investment in socially responsible products can affect positive change in whole industries and communities. It's the right thing to do. Choices like Fair Trade products also give our Members the opportunity to participate in social growth, to give back and to give people hope. Members have let us know that this is important to them."

So what is Fair Trade? Workers participating in Fair Trade programs are guaranteed a fair price for their goods, based on an analysis of the cost of living where they live—a price that will allow them to lead their lives with dignity. This process is administered in the U.S. by TransFair**, a non-profit organization.

In addition, the cooperative or group of producers (in this case, farmers) receives a 25% premium on the guaranteed minimum Fair Trade price to be used for education, health and/or other social projects for the benefit of the entire community. The members of the cooperative determine where this money should be invested. With the Fair Trade model, consumers are able to spend their money in a way that directly supports these improvements in the lives of small growers in third world countries.

Currently, there are only three Fair Trade Certified wine-growing regions in the world: South Africa, Argentina and Chile. When Sam's Club determined that introducing a great Fair Trade wine was a priority, they asked all of their wine suppliers to bring in samples of every wine that was Fair Trade Certified with no limitations on variety or price. As a result, they were presented with more than 100 candidates.

The entire wine team conducted a tasting of this international array of wines. They were astonished that the outcome on this massive process was so clear. An Argentinean Malbec from Bodega Furlotti was head and shoulders above all of the others. It was especially amazing considering that it was far from the most expensive wine sampled.

The Sam's Club Wine Team then took the advanced step of purchasing highly rated Malbecs across every price point— Fair Trade no object—and ran another series of tastings. Bingo! The results were the same. The Malbec from Bodega Furlotti was the best in this sampling, too.

Said McCreary, "We went to such great lengths because we know that Fair Trade is only a sustainable concept if we offer a superior-tasting wine. That is why we are excited to partner with one of Argentina's oldest and most respected wine producing families—the Furlottis. They have been producing wine in Argentina for over 100 years since their founder, Angel Furlotti, emigrated from Italy with little more than his winemaking expertise and a love of the soil. Today, Bodega Furlotti is focused solely on Fair Trade grapes and creating wines that are the first choice for consumers who are committed to both social justice and premium quality wine."

Following the classic Fair Trade model, the grapes for Neu Direction are grown by a cooperative. Named Viña de la Solidaridad, it is an association of 20 small growers on very small family-owned farms (ranging from about 3.5 acres to 38 acres). All of the growers in the cooperative were chosen by Furlotti because their fields were in the best Malbec grape-growing areas. The Sam's Club team was moved to find out that the members of Viña de la Solidaridad voted to use the premium from this first season of Neu Direction to provide critical medical care for one of their members.

McCreary is very enthusiastic about the potential for more Fair Trade wines from Argentina. "The team is going down to Argentina to visit Fair Trade wineries and actively seek other Fair Trade wines. We are limited only by the need for the best quality at the best value. We'll also get a firsthand look at how Neu Direction is impacting the local social environment."

McCreary also wants Members to know that "a versatile wine like this is ideal for holiday entertaining, when several main dishes are often on the menu. And at less than \$11 a bottle, we suggest you buy it by the case while the limited quantities last. Neu Direction will be in most Clubs."

***The Malbec Story**

Malbec is the most popular new varietal in America this year and is going strong. However, it has had a checkered past. Malbec was planted in the Bordeaux region of France for centuries, but never became a great success there. When it was brought to Argentina by Italian immigrants and planted in the Mendoza region, a brilliant marriage was realized. It turned out that Mendoza is the perfect terroir for Malbec. In an ironic twist, a Furlotti Malbec won the award for Best Fair Trade Red at the European Fair Trade wine competition in 2008. Wine expert Robert Parker said, "Malbecs are rich, concentrated, complex and deservedly popular—and they can compete with Bordeaux several times the price."

Malbec really put Argentina on the wine making map and the country did the same for the grape. The Furlottis chose Malbec as their focus for this wine because they wanted to make three statements with one bottle. They were determined to craft a Fair Trade wine that was of premium quality and also very representative of Argentina. The winemakers believe that the person who buys Neu Direction to please their conscience will also please their palate.

****TransFair**

TransFair is the only independent, third-party organization in the U.S. that certifies Fair Trade Certified products. Their certification standards also have strong ecological benefits. TransFair enforces farm management practices that serve to protect watersheds, virgin forests and wildlife and prohibits a long list of agro-chemicals that are harmful to both workers' health and the environment. TransFair also guarantees growers a premium for organic crops. For more information visit www.transfairusa.org.