Hedgerow Planting

Foursight Wines, Boonville, CA

Meet Kristy Charles and Foursight Wines

Foursight Wines is a family owned and operated winery in Mendocino's Anderson Valley. Founded in 2006 by Bill and Nancy Charles, their daughter Kristy Charles and her husband Joseph Webb, they craft small lots of estate-grown Pinot Noir, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc. Their aim is to farm the vineyard sustainably and responsibly to ensure that the vineyard, and their family is healthy and happy for years to come. The Mendocino Lavender & Pollinator Garden, founded in 2023, is the newest addition to the farm. They now grow six varieties of lavender, and care for an extensive native plant hedgerow installed to provide the year-round food and unique shelter that lavender can't provide. They offer tours of the farm, including a guided native plant walk on youtube. To learn more about the farm, visit foursightwines.com.

Farm at a Glance

COUNTY: Mendocino

FARM SIZE: 15 acres of winegrapes, 2.5 acres of lavender

PRODUCTS: Winegrapes, wine, fresh lavender and lavender products

SOILS: Clay loam

Goals for the farm

- Create a sustainable farm that can be passed down to future generations
- Give back to the land through responsible stewardship and regenerative practices
- Promote the value of native pollinator habitat as a supporter of both agricultural and ecological success
- Develop a closed-loop system in which all agricultural products are grown and processed entirely onsite

Why Hedgerows?

Beneficial Habitat & Insect Value

Native plant hedgerows provide essential habitat for a variety of beneficial insects and wildlife. By including a diverse mix of flowering species, these plantings ideally support native pollinators year-round, as well as predatory insects that can help manage pest species. Hedgerows also offer food and shelter for insectivorous birds, small mammals, and amphibians. Kristy was motivated to plant a hedgerow to have habitat and food for insects and pollinators year-round when the lavender is not in bloom. One example of the increased biodiversity they have seen since installing the hedgerow is more birds feeding on insects and supporting the on-farm cycle.

Additionally, hedgerow-supported biodiversity contributes to a more balanced on-farm ecosystem and can reduce the need for pesticides. Recent research shows hedgerows offer habitat for birds that help manage on-farm pests.

Aesthetic Value

Well-designed hedgerows can enhance the visual appeal of working landscapes. The use of native plants introduces seasonal color, texture, and structural diversity, transforming field edges into more dynamic and diverse spaces.

This natural beauty also creates a more inviting space for visitors, workers, and neighbors, becoming part of the lasting image of the farm.

Educational Value

Hedgerows offer excellent opportunities for education and outreach by serving as examples of conservation in action. With additions like educational signage and a stop at the hedgerows during farm tours, they provide a living demonstration of native species interactions, wildlife habitat, and biodiverse agricultural systems. Their visibility and accessibility make them ideal teaching tools, as well as the excitement that farmers often have to share about them! Education for consumers was a motivating factor for Kristy in establishing the hedgerow and they have seen excitement from customers and farm visitors for learning about native plants and projects that support biodiversity on working lands. Kristy and her team even developed a “bug bingo” game for farm visitors.

Low Cost, Low Risk

Generally, installation and maintenance is relatively inexpensive and low risk. Native species are well-adapted to local conditions and once established are self-sustaining and resilient, often thriving without additional inputs. Free grant and technical assistance is also frequently available through Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) and other conservation agencies, making hedgerows a low cost conservation practice with high upside.

Above: Foursight’s hedgerow diversity, including California lilac, germander, coyote mint, and flannel bush.

Resources

- CAFF Hedgerow Manual
- Wild Farm Alliance: Installing Habitat to Increase Farm Diversity
- Tending the Edges: The Benefits of Hedgerows on Bay Area Working Lands
- Fibershed’s Quick Guide to Hedgerows

Challenges & Opportunities

Establishment

While hedgerows have relatively low maintenance needs over time, successful establishment of plants can require labor and resources beyond what grant programs cover. Foursight experienced plant mortality due to extreme weather events and drought and had to purchase replacement plants out of pocket for up to 10% of their overall project. With respect to species selection, Kristy had the following advice to share: "*We learned not to overreach for certain plant species that may not be an ideal fit for the landscape. Most of the plants that didn't make it through the first winter and summer were not suited for either how wet/cold or how hot/dry the site was in each season*." They are considering climate adaptation when making decisions about replanting to select species that can thrive under expected future conditions. Irrigation is necessary for the first few years following planting and Kristy shared that fine-tuning irrigation takes time, particularly during the busiest part of the season when summer workload is high. Although plants need additional water to establish, Kristy has seen improvements to soil water retention from the hedgerow planting.

Sourcing Plants

Foursight found it challenging to source plants locally. Many nurseries in their area are smaller-scale and may not have large inventories on hand. Plant sourcing requires planning ahead and identifying desirable species with a long enough runway to explore availability. Kristy reserved plants in advance at the Cal Flora Nursey in Santa Rosa. Regarding plant pricing, a big opportunity is to access wholesale pricing by doing a project that is sufficiently sized. Kristy was able to work with Anderson Valley Farm Supply to receive wholesale pricing.

Funding

"If you can manage the labor, the Healthy Soils Program is worth it and comes with a lot of help from your RCD. It is worthwhile to seek technical advice from the RCD and use their technical advisors to help with the details."

Funding is available to support hedgerow implementation through the CA Department of Food and Ag (CDFA), USDA-NRCS, and at times directly through RCDs. Kristy secured hedgerow funding through the CDFA Healthy Soils Program and had a postive experience working with CDFA and the local RCD as a technical assistance provider. The program covered all costs of materials for plants, mulch, and irrigation. Kristy shared that working with the RCD was a huge bonus, "*MCRCD provided all of the technical resources required for the project – maps, plant lists, cost estimates, hands-on assistance – as well as much of the administration – application assistance, grant assistance, scope of work adjustments – and what to plant and how to plant*."

Getting Started

When Kristy and Joseph started researching how to install a hedgerow, they contacted the following local organizations and agencies for project planning resources:

- Mendocino County Resource Conservation District
- Anderson Valley Winegrowers
- Mendocino County Farm Bureau

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