



## Weighing Wine

from  
A to Z

**A SURVIVOR® OTR truck scale and 720i™ indicator/controller are premium tools of efficiency in commercial winemaking.**

*By Caleb Olson, editor*

Pinot Noir is the holy grail of the wine world. Coveted for its rich flavor, complex aroma and velvety mouthfeel, this grape variety makes for one of the most popular (and notoriously difficult to produce) wines. A to Z Wineworks in Willamette Valley, Oregon, has mastered the delicate art of Pinot Noir; because of this, the winery has gained national attention and experienced rapid growth. To keep up with demand, A to Z modernized their processes—and installed a SURVIVOR OTR truck scale and 720i indicator/controller to efficiently manage their shipments.

The demand for high-quality Pinot Noir can be traced back to the first century, when Ancient Romans began making the unique wine. News of this innovation traveled through the grapevine to gradually gain worldwide recognition. However, it was difficult to produce.

Challenges seem to present themselves at each stage of the Pinot process. The grapes are not only difficult to grow, but they also bruise easily and must be skillfully picked, handled and transported. Then, the fruit ferments so furiously that the process can accelerate out of control and erupt like a delicious volcano, ruining an entire batch. Even after it's bottled, problems persist: The wine can lose its color, aroma and acid balance. Pinot Noir may be the holy grail of wine, but it can also be a problem child.

It was long thought that only the Burgundy region of France could produce consistently great Pinot Noir. The mild climate, ocean breezes, ideal soil conditions and sunward-facing slopes were perfect for growing Pinot grapes. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, a relative newcomer burst onto the winemaking scene. The Willamette Valley of Oregon

began producing Pinot comparable, if not better, than the famed Burgundy region. The two areas share many of the same characteristics: Pleasant temperatures, soil composition, rolling hills and even ocean proximity. They also sit along the 45<sup>th</sup> Parallel,



*Above: A to Z Wineworks' efficiency was increased by bulk-weighing incoming shipments of wine and fruit on a SURVIVOR OTR truck scale. A tanker truck exits the scale after delivering a shipment of wine.*

a contour that is home to some of the world's greatest wineries. Here, four friends decided to open a winery that would specialize in Pinot Noir.

In 2002, Deb Hatcher, Bill Hatcher, Sam Tannahill and Cheryl Francis founded A to Z Wineworks. The mission of these two married couples was to not only produce a pristine Pinot, but offer it at an affordable price—something that had never been done previously. Unlike many other Oregon wineries, A to Z would source its fruit from vineyards across the state. This would allow them to make adjustments to each year's vintage based on variable characteristics of that growing season. If vineyard A received a large amount of rain and vineyard B was unusually dry, the ratio of grapes used from these vineyards could be altered to match previous seasons' successful recipes. Leveraging more than 100 different vineyards, the end result is a consistency that represents the best of the state (and serves as the company's slogan): The Essence of Oregon®.

A to Z quickly rose to prominence. They applied their business plan to a complete line of wine varieties, including Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling and Rosé. Demand began to grow, and so did the company. They added more employees, an estate vineyard and a fifth partner, Greg Popovich (who also has a second job as head coach of the San Antonio Spurs). Throughout the company, processes were modernized and optimized for efficiency. They streamlined their shipping/

receiving system at the estate vineyard—which also serves as A to Z's corporate headquarters.

Unloading a truckload of fruit takes a lot of time, especially when it is weighed one pallet at a time. The laborious process involved a forklift transporting each pallet to a nearby floor scale to record its weight. "We would get a flatbed with 20 tons on it," says Jeff Hines, warehouse coordinator. "That's 20 times to the truck to pick a bin, set it on the scale, back out, get the weight, pick it off the scale and then stack it. During the harvest, we needed two people unloading fruit, and it would take two hours. Then the truck would have to come back in a few days to pick up the empty bins after they were washed." A to Z was processing an impressive amount of wine (10 percent of Oregon's entire Pinot Noir output) and they needed a better solution. Scales Northwest installed the perfect solution: A SURVIVOR OTR truck scale and 720i indicator/controller. Rather than weighing one pallet at a time, an entire truck can now be weighed at once. "At first, we were all a little nervous," remembers Jeff. "The scale was installed right before harvest, which is our busiest time. None of us had ever used a truck scale before. We were used to little scales, and we were going to immediately rely on it." However, the improvement was quickly apparent.

"On the truck scale, we can turn a complete truck in one hour and 45 minutes with only one person," says Jeff. "That's less than the time it took just to offload the truck before, and the truck doesn't have to come back for the bins. With the SURVIVOR, I'm able to provide a higher level of customer service. My efficiency is through the roof. I drove my payroll down. It's a win all the way around!"

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The truck scale provided immediate savings, but it was also installed with future development in mind. Beneath the scale lies an empty cavern which will soon be filled with additional equipment. "We're going to add a dolly so we can dump directly off the scale into production bins below," explains Jeff. "It's another way to speed up our process and maximize efficiency."

Each passing season, more time is saved. At A to Z, however, time is not documented in days, months or years. It's chronicled by vintages. The 2015 harvest was the first to be weighed on a SURVIVOR truck scale. At Rice Lake Weighing Systems, we think increased efficiency makes that particular vintage just a little sweeter. ■