

DIRT TO GLASS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

august 21, 2025

traverse city, michigan



2025

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM



DIRT TO GLASS

from **INTENTION** to **IMPACT**



After three years of clarity, community-building, & bold conversation, **Dirt to Glass 2025** marks a shift from *ideas* to *action*. We're moving from what could be to what will be. This year's sessions are intentionally curated to fuel change — from the soil to the sales floor — and to empower every voice in the room.

LOOKING BACK TO LEAP FORWARD — A DIRT TO GLASS RETROSPECTIVE

*past as prologue.
vision as fuel.*

Amanda Danielson
Intentional Agriculture
Paolo Sabbatini, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

Since 2021, **Dirt to Glass** has served as a catalyst for collaboration, clarity, and ambition across Michigan's wine industry. In this opening session, co-founders Paolo Sabbatini and Amanda Danielson will reflect on where we've been, how far we've come, and — most importantly — where we go next. Designed to set the tone for a full day of rich dialogue and practical insight, this session invites participants to engage not just as listeners, but as co-creators in the ongoing transformation of Michigan wine.

GRAPES, GRIT, & GROWING PAINS — REWRITING THE RULES ON VALUE

*better relationships.
better grapes.
better margins.*

Katie Nelson
Ste. Michelle Wine Estates

With more than two decades of experience crafting wines across Washington State and beyond, Katie Nelson serves as Chief Winemaker for Ste. Michelle Wine Estates — one of the Pacific Northwest's most influential producers and a pioneer of American premium wine. In this keynote, Katie shares hard-earned lessons from a company balancing scale with distinction, and how authentic grower partnerships and relentless focus on quality can redefine what it means to compete — and lead — in a crowded market.

BEYOND THE LABEL — A CANDID CONVERSATION ON QUALITY OVER PRICE

*trust isn't
grown in tanks.*

Bryan Ulbrich | CONVERSATOR
Left Foot Charlie

After Katie Nelson's keynote lights a few fires, Michigan wine veteran Bryan Ulbrich joins her onstage for a spirited and grounded follow-up. With humor, honesty, and plenty of real-world perspective, this conversation goes deeper into what it takes to build lasting, productive relationships between growers, producers, and distributors. Expect straight talk about collaboration, navigating change with professionalism, and how transparency can be the most powerful tool in the cellar — and across the supply chain.

STRIPPED LABELS, SURPRISING TRUTHS — LET THE WINE SPEAK

*when you don't know
what it is —
you find out what
it is.*

Tim Godfrey | MODERATOR
Lake Michigan College

This session invites participants to taste with intention — and without assumptions. Five wines, selected from a global pool of over 30 benchmark examples, will be presented double-blind. Each represents a stylistic expression that can be achieved with grapes grown right here in Michigan. Guided by a panel of seasoned industry professionals, this tasting challenges conventional selling points and makes the case for style as the most compelling — and accessible — story we can tell.

BANKING ON SOIL — FARMING FOR A FUTURE WE CAN COUNT ON

sustainability isn't a buzzword — it's a balance sheet.

Bruno Basso, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

Dr. Bruno Basso — internationally recognized agroecosystem scientist, prolific author, and founder of The Soil Inventory Project (TSIP) — brings his cutting-edge work to **Dirt to Glass**. With a focus on soil carbon sequestration, data-informed land management, and climate-smart agriculture, this session connects the dots between environmental stewardship and long-term economic viability. For grape growers, winemakers, and industry leaders alike, Basso's insights offer a clear path toward farming that is not only more sustainable, but more profitable, measurable, and resilient.

MARGINS, MARKETS, & MEANING — SELLING SMARTER IN 2025

selling wine is no longer about who you know — it's about what you stand for.

Paul Hannah | MODERATOR
Meijer

Distribution isn't just about logistics — it's a key driver of profitability and long-term success. This panel brings together the largest distributor in Michigan (specializing in high-volume, commodity wines), a boutique distributor placing premium Michigan wines in Chicago, a small producer focused exclusively on high-end bottlings, and a sales professional from a successful Michigan winery. Moderated by Paul Hannah of Meijer, the conversation will explore how pricing, placement, and strategic alignment shape both perception and profit in a competitive, value-conscious market.

FUTUREPROOFED — RETHINKING WHAT BELONGS IN THE GROUND

resilience meets distinction in the vineyard of tomorrow.

Paolo Sabbatini, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

With climate variability, disease pressure, and shifting market demands, the varieties we plant today determine the wines we can make tomorrow. Dr. Paolo Sabbatini — renowned viticulture researcher and longtime advocate for intentional site-variety matching — presents new insights into the potential of PiWi and other direct-producing grape varieties. More than a scientific update, this session explores how Michigan can lead the way in redefining quality through resilience. It's a wake-up call for growers and producers alike: our future is being planted right now.

GROWERS UNCORKED — WHAT IT TAKES, WHAT IT GIVES

no vineyard, no vision. these are the voices that matter.

Lee Lutes | MODERATOR
Black Star Farms

Behind every great bottle is a grower who made it possible — and often, against the odds. This panel brings together seasoned grape growers from across Michigan, each offering a distinct perspective shaped by geography, scale, and experience. From site selection and disease pressure to evolving quality standards and the need to ensure fruit is marketable, this session digs into the daily decisions that shape the future of Michigan wine. Moderated by Lee Lutes of Black Star Farms, the conversation promises candor, camaraderie, and a timely reminder: the foundation of a sustainable wine industry is built row by row.

DIRT TO GLASS, & BACK AGAIN — WHAT WE LEARNED, WHAT WE BUILD

we started with intention. we end with momentum.

Amanda Danielson & Paolo Sabbatini, Ph.D.

After a day of bold ideas and shared insights, this final session brings us full circle. Facilitated by Paolo Sabbatini and Amanda Danielson, participants will contribute real-time feedback through a live survey and collective discussion. Together, we'll distill key takeaways and define next steps — grounding the day's learning in action. This isn't a recap. It's a hand off — to every grower, maker, seller, and leader in the room — to carry **Dirt to Glass** forward with clarity, courage, and collaboration.



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