

# Napa entrepreneur goes green with grapeseeds

Story and photos by **Jim Morris**



Napa grapeseed oil producer Valentin Humer, right, is making history with a once-discarded vineyard byproduct, winning praise for his high-quality oils in the process.

**Farmers** and chefs alike are often searching for the next big thing—a product that gives them an edge in their fiercely competitive businesses. If Valentin Humer fulfills his long quest, grapeseed oil will be that key ingredient, providing a sizable new business in California.

More than 15 years ago, Humer traded his job as chef and hotelier in Austria to make gourmet grapeseed oil through his Napa-based company, Food & Vine Inc.

Salute Santé, which is Italian and French for “to your health,” is currently sold at hundreds of gourmet retailers and health food markets such as Williams-Sonoma, Sur La Table, Cost Plus World Market, Whole Foods and Wild Oats. And more than 500 finer restaurants across the country feature it, including Julia’s Kitchen at COPIA, the American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts, in Napa.

“It’s a workhorse in our kitchen,” said executive chef Jeff Mosher, who uses the oil for sautéing, marinades and vinaigrettes.

“It’s one of those things that makes everything work together. It’s also a very healthy, all-natural product.”

Food & Vine makes its oil from the grapeseeds of fruit grown and pressed in Italy, although Humer said he hopes to partner with California grape growers in the coming years.

Grapeseeds are largely a byproduct of the winemaking process, so this emerging product could be a literal trash-into-treasure success story.

It takes 1 ton of grapes to make a 33-ounce bottle of grapeseed oil. With about 1 million acres of grapevines in California, Humer said there are enough grapeseeds in the state to make 12 million bottles of oil each year.

“What a great thing to get one more use out of them,” said Daryl Sattui, Napa Valley vintner and owner of V. Sattui winery. “To be able to produce it here just makes so much more sense than having to bring it 6,000 miles. I think the potential for grapeseed oil is tremendous.”

Humer not only delivers his oil to restaurants, he picks up their used oil and uses it to power his company truck and Mercedes sedan. He said it took only simple changes to his diesel engine to do the trick.

“I haven’t seen a gas station for over two years,” he said. “It’s a pretty simple way to save lots of money.”

Food & Vine and Salute Santé offer a rare if not unique complete ecological cycle of reuse and recycling and are certified green by Co-op America Business Network.

“I’m very fortunate to be part of creating history with an ingredient that has a lot going for it,” Humer said. “I see grapeseed oil today where olive oil was about 10 to 15 years ago, which was a fairly fast-growing market. Now, it’s a \$600-million-a-year industry.”

For more information, visit [www.grape-seedoil.com](http://www.grape-seedoil.com) or call 888-388-7117.

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