FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VILLA MARIA ANNOUNCES CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP OF NEW YORK CITY’S BILLION OYSTER PROJECT

New Zealand’s Most Awarded Winery Aligns with Restoration Nonprofit Over Shared Values and a Commitment to Promote Sustainability

NEW YORK, NY (April 5, 2022) – Villa Maria, New Zealand’s renowned winery, is pleased to announce their corporate sponsorship of Billion Oyster Project, the nonprofit oyster reef restoration initiative that grew out of The Urban Assembly New York Harbor School.

A founding member of Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand in 1997, Villa Maria continues to serve as a leader in sustainability, focusing on the well-being of the land, people, and the community as core values in its long-term vision. The partnership with Billion Oyster Project is a testament to Villa Maria’s commitment to sustainable practices, and includes participation in corporate volunteer days where participants can learn about oyster restoration through hands-on experience, and a co-hosted Oyster Soirée event designed to engage and educate guests about the Project’s work alongside a tasting of Villa Maria Sauvignon Blanc wines with freshly shucked oysters.

“Our love for this planet and our communities guides us to put sustainability at the forefront of all that we do from a global perspective — we take care to preserve our resources so they last well into the future and like to raise up communities throughout the world where people enjoy our wines,” said Sarah Szegota, head of marketing and communications at Villa Maria. “We are thrilled to have the opportunity to team with Billion Oyster Project, with whom we have a strong synergy in shared values and perfect food and wine pairings, to support their oyster restoration initiatives.”

Billion Oyster Project was founded in 2014 by Murray Fisher and Pete Malinowski, then colleagues at the Harbor School, as a solution to the degradation of the New York Estuary’s once 220,000 acres of oyster reefs. Oysters grow in intricate reef formations that act as natural barriers to shoreline storm damage, filter pollutants, and provide habitat for hundreds of species. Billion Oyster Project believes a successful restoration of New York’s reefs and their ecological functions will revitalize local biodiversity, prepare a generation of environmental stewards, and build a more resilient Harbor to meet the consequences of climate change.
Teaming with the local community, Billion Oyster Project has planted 75 million juvenile oysters across 14.5 acres and 18 reef sites, and engaged more than 8,000 students and 11,000 volunteers since its inception.

“We are determined to engage one million people in the effort to restore one billion oysters,” explains Brian Reagor, Director of Development at Billion Oyster Project. “Thanks to Villa Maria’s support, we are on a path to reviving these ‘ecosystem engineers’ and igniting local passion and appreciation for New York Harbor.”

Last year, Villa Maria forged their relationship with Billion Oyster Project by sponsoring their tentpole fundraising event, the Billion Oyster Party, to promote the initiative and further the nonprofit’s efforts. With the new corporate sponsorship, Villa Maria aims to continue supporting environmental preservation and combat the destruction of marine habitat, on which natural life depends.

Villa Maria is represented by Winebow Imports in the U.S. For more information about the winery’s sustainability practices, please visit https://www.villamariawines.com/aboutus/sustainability/. To learn more about Billion Oyster Project, please visit https://www.billionoysterproject.org/.

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**About Villa Maria**

Villa Maria, New Zealand’s most iconic winery, has been pioneering a new breed of fresh, vibrant and adventurous wines since 1961. From simple beginnings in Auckland, New Zealand, Villa Maria has expanded significantly to become one of the world’s most admired wine brands, sold in over 60 countries and amassing over 2,000 awards. Villa Maria remains proudly New Zealand-owned, and this contributes to its agility and unrelenting focus on core values quality, innovation and sustainability. [www.villamariawines.com](http://www.villamariawines.com)

**About Billion Oyster Project**

Billion Oyster Project is a nonprofit organization on a mission to restore oyster reefs to New York Harbor through public education initiatives. Oysters’ reefs provide habitat for many marine species, have the ability to filter water, and help shield New York City shorelines from storm damage. Founded on the belief that restoration without education is temporary, and observing that learning outcomes improve when students have the opportunity to work on real restoration projects, Billion Oyster Project collaborates with public schools. The crew designs STEM curriculum for NYC schools through the lens of oyster restoration, and engages Urban Assembly New York Harbor School students in large-scale restoration projects, collects discarded oyster shells from dozens of NYC restaurants, and engages the local community. [www.billionoysterproject.org](http://www.billionoysterproject.org)

**About Winebow Imports**

Winebow Imports has been an industry leader for over 40 years, representing some of the most esteemed properties from both prominent and emerging growing areas around the world. A national importer known for cultivating lasting relationships with extraordinary vintners who are dedicated to their unique regions, Winebow Imports continues to balance its impressive growth with a culture of specialization and excellence. For more information, please visit [www.winebow.com/imports](http://www.winebow.com/imports).