

How Should I Decide Which Blocks to Sample for Petiole Analysis?

Petiole analysis can be used either to monitor the performance of the fertiliser program or to diagnose problems with the nutrition of a particular block.

Monitoring: If it is being used to monitor performance then samples should be drawn from “typical” or “index” blocks. Those which have been treated and are performing normally. Standard varieties such as Chardonnay, Cabernet or Shiraz should be preferred.

Information from these can be used as a means of checking up on treatment of the whole vineyard. These blocks can be regarded as index blocks.

After a block has been analysed over three or four years, it may be sensible to shift to another block as the index block. That way, you can accumulate some more information about the whole vineyard.

Diagnosis: If the testing is being done to diagnose a problem, then the samples should be taken from problem blocks. Sometimes it is useful to take two samples, one from a “good” area and one for comparison from the “bad” area.

HOW MANY BLOCKS SHOULD BE SAMPLED IN A VINEYARD?

This becomes a matter of judgement.

If there are two or three soil types on the block, it may be sensible to set up index blocks to represent each of the major soil types.

If only two or three varieties are being grown, you may wish to set up an index block for each of these.

If there are plantings of two distinct age groups, for example, some may be over 25 years old and others under 5, in this case it may be sensible to set up index blocks which represent all blocks of each age group.

If there are patches growing on rootstock in the vineyard then you may wish to sample an index block for vines on that particular rootstock and compare these with an index block on its own roots.

The bottom line, of course, is how much do you want to spend. For example, if you are using a relatively simple and inexpensive fertiliser program, you may wish to spend less money on nutritional monitoring than if you are in a difficult area where a relatively complex and expensive fertiliser program is being used. In the latter case, the percentage saving from a greater amount of information may be much higher.

For a 50-acre vineyard, I suggest 4 or 5 samples might be collected.

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