

Newsletter

DECEMBER 2003

Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter!

The Directors and Staff of Scholefield Robinson wish you the "Compliments of the Season" and hope that 2004 is a good year for you, your family, and your business.

None of the horticultural industries that we work with ever stay the same from one year to the next. The supply/demand position in the wine industry is causing downward pressure on grape prices. The increasing value of the Australian dollar is either making our export pricing less competitive or our returns in Australian dollars less. However, one of the benefits arising from a strong dollar is lower prices for imported equipment and machinery.

Almond plantings are continuing at a rapid rate in Australia and California. The aggressive marketing program of the California Almond Board is also having positive benefits for our producers.

We receive many favourable comments on our regular newsletters and most people like to hear about the things that we do for our clients. Many are not aware of how broad and diverse our business really is and whenever we list the activities for the year, we often surprise ourselves!

MAJOR PROJECT WORK

National Vine Health Steering Committee

This committee is the peak, consultative group (state and Commonwealth government and industry membership) focused on national grapevine health and biosecurity issues. Prue McMichael serves as the Secretariat of the Committee.

This year the NVHSC has finalised the Viticulture Protection Plan which is now with Plant Health Australia and ready for release. In it, potential threats to the industry are identified and prioritised, and a response strategy is outlined. These activities combined with PHA and industry's negotiations over a cost-sharing agreement for incursion management are focusing industry on risk management and preparedness.

The NVHSC's technical reference group for vine collections and propagation has also been active and will soon commence the development of industry guidelines for production and maintenance of vine material with known, and higher, health status. These will incorporate the best of national and international clean planting material schemes and technology.

Vineyard Acidification

Scholefield Robinson obtained funding from Land and Water Australia to undertake a project on soil acidification in vineyards. The objective of this project is to provide a preliminary assessment of the nature and potential risk of extreme acidity occurring in vineyard soils.

We have conducted soil sampling in three major viticultural regions in South Australia and are in the process of digesting the resulting data. This will be used to verify a model of pH changes in viticultural soils which we hope will be useful in risk management. This model will allow the potential risks for extreme pH conditions to be evaluated and may lead to subsequent work to determine the best means of responding to these risks. Doug Reuter and Richard Merry are working with us on this project, which we expect to complete in early 2004.

Phylloxera Outbreak Rootstock Demand Study

Following on from the major study completed in 2002 on "The Risk and Economic Impact of Phylloxera in South Australia's Viticultural Regions", Peter Scholefield and Prudence Honner are currently working with the Phylloxera and Grape Industry Board of SA on another project.

The aim is to determine the impact of an outbreak of phylloxera on the demand for rootstocks, the ability of the nursery businesses to meet the demand and to make recommendations for minimising the impact of phylloxera on the supply of grafted vines.

We are working under the guidance of the Outbreak Management Committee of the Board and will present the final report in late February 2004.

Use of Reclaimed Water in Vineyards

Scholefield Robinson was recently commissioned to prepare a discussion paper on the issues surrounding the use of reclaimed water for irrigation in a vineyard near Ararat. Use of reclaimed water for irrigation in vineyards is seen as one way of recycling our water resource but can cause problems with the chemical and physical soil properties as well as potential management and environmental issues.

Land and Water Repair Fund

Charles Drew is a member of a team developing a major proposal for a land and water repair fund that includes an R&D fund that will be targeted at large corporate investors and superannuation funds. The project is aimed at identifying opportunities to provide both private and public rewards for the application of improved natural resource management and implementation of alternative land uses. The initial phase has been partly funded by the Centre for Natural Resource Management and is managed by IID.

McLaren Vale Vineyard Irrigation Workshops

Scholefield Robinson has been engaged by the McLaren Vale Grape, Wine & Tourism Industry Association to deliver a number of extension workshops designed to demonstrate efficient, quality focused irrigation techniques for their local growers.

The first of three workshops took place on December 2nd to look at key irrigation issues at flowering/set. There was an overwhelming response, with 70 growers attending to look at major soil types, examine soil pits and to hear about other growers' own experiences with irrigation scheduling, grape quality and the use of

soil monitoring equipment on different soils. We look forward to the next two workshops, planned for veraison and pre-harvest where there will be a focus on controlling the extent of water stress and maintaining leaf function for adequate maturity of fruit.

Work With Regular Clients

We have many clients, large and small, for whom we provide services on a regular basis throughout the year. Thanks for your loyalty and support again in 2003. We value greatly the opportunity to work with you and your vineyard, orchard, or agribusiness.

OTHER CONSULTANCY ACTIVITIES

Project Evaluations

Charles Drew, Ben Robinson, Peter Scholefield and Garth Swinburn have all been retained by managers and potential investors in large agribusiness projects to independently assess the proposals and performance of the projects. The projects have included winegrapes, table grapes, olives, stonefruit and recently, a piggery project. Clients value the independent opinions provided by experienced and credible consultants.

Expert Opinions for Legal Cases

The senior consultants in Scholefield Robinson have all been engaged to provide expert opinions for legal disputes. The cases have ranged from weedicide spray drift, inappropriate chemical recommendations, motor vehicle accidents preventing a grower from maintaining a vineyard, nursery problems, floods, hail, fires, etc.

This work requires a very high level of knowledge of the crop, experience in investigating the cause of the problem, the capacity to deal professionally with the people on both sides of the claim, and experience in the methodology of calculating economic loss.

Charles Drew has also been involved as an expert in some planning disputes in the Adelaide Hills that have ended up in the Environment, Resources and Development Court.



The PGIBSA study tour group visited UC Davis to meet with key phylloxera, rootstock, clonal and vine propagation researchers.

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Winegrape Quality Assessments

Garth Swinburn has worked with a large number of growers in the Riverland and Sunraysia regions helping them to better understand the issues in their vineyards that influence grape and wine quality.

Prudence Honner has carried out similar work with a large grower group in McLaren Vale and other growers in the Adelaide Hills, Barossa Valley and Clare.

AROUND THE OFFICES

New Adelaide Office

The office at Parkside is continuing to fulfil our needs and to provide our hard working staff with the facilities and resources that they need to maintain a high level of service to our clients.

If you have not yet dropped in to the new office, you are most welcome at any time.

Mildura Office

Under the leadership of Garth Swinburn, the Mildura office is continuing to grow and be recognised as the place to ring when you have a need for horticultural service. In addition to the skills and experience of Garth, the whole Scholefield Robinson team in Adelaide can also be accessed via the Mildura office.

Garth has recently been notified that he has received an AusIndustry Grant to appoint a graduate to work on aspects of winegrape quality in conjunction with CSIRO at Merbein. This appointment will double the staff in the Mildura office.

Expansion - What Next?

In order to provide a complete range of services to the horticultural industries, Scholefield Robinson is always looking for new opportunities.

Stuart Pettigrew will join us on February 2 as a Senior Consultant with specific responsibility for fruit and nut crops. Stuart has a background in citrus, IPM, grapes and has special skills in irrigation technology. He has been running his own business in Queensland in recent times and we are very pleased that he is joining us.

BUILDING OUR SKILLS

Conferences, Workshops & Seminars

All professional staff at Scholefield Robinson continue to build and improve their skills and knowledge. Here are some of the main events we have recently attended.

- 2 Ben Robinson attended the *Symposium on Precision Agriculture Research and Implementation in Australia* in August. Precision Agriculture techniques have become routine in a number of field crops (eg cotton, cereals) and R&D with viticulture (CSIRO) is well advanced. Opportunities are being explored for application of some of the principles to orchard crops and vegetables.
- 2 Ben Thomas attended *Potatoes by the Sea*, a conference held at Portland, Victoria in August.
- 2 Ben Robinson presented a short paper on the roles played by various branches of science in modern horticulture at the *CMV Foundation Study Tour* in the Riverland. This study tour was held for the Science Teachers' Association and the CMV Foundation provided participants with a splendid opportunity to see science at work in real life horticulture.
- 2 Peter Scholefield was an invited speaker at the *Herbs, Native Foods and Essential Oils Conference* held in Lismore in August, where he spoke on the chemical issues facing the developing culinary herb industry. As a result he also appeared on the ABC Landline program.

PGIBSA Californian Pest & Disease Study Tour

Prudence Honner travelled to California along with 15 other grape growers, consultants & researchers in August this year to learn more about pest and disease

issues currently faced by their industry. They were fortunate enough to meet a number of growers and key extension officers to learn first hand about their experiences with Phylloxera, Pierce's Disease (PD), glassy winged sharp shooter (GWSS), vine mealy bug, nematodes and Powdery Mildew.

Of particular interest was the casual attitude of both growers & extension staff toward phylloxera infestation, where one vineyard had been replanted 3 times in the last 30 years.

Rootstock failure (AXR-1) was a big problem for many growers and accurate rootstock selection continues to be important as nematode infestations spread in a number of regions. Ironically, the much needed, publicly funded research into rootstock performance has come to a standstill and the valuable University of California agricultural extension service has had a 25% budget cut. The group got "up close & personal" on a number of occasions and witnessed the devastating effects of PD. After concentrated research efforts there is a high level of confidence that PD is under control.

Surprisingly, there was an obvious lack of vineyard hygiene despite the number of infected vineyards visited by the group.

In terms of Powdery Mildew control, it was eye opening to note the wide spread use of dusting sulphur across the state. As air pollution is such a major problem, the use of sulphur dust is under review and is being blamed for increased outbreaks of two spotted mites.

In all, the tour was very informative and gave many of us confidence in the strategies and practices used in Australian viticulture.

Australian Olive Industry Conference

Ben Robinson was a delegate to the Australian Olive Industry Conference and a series of workshops in Brisbane in October.

This year (2003) saw the first major harvest for many of the modern groves established over the last five years. Speakers reported that oil extraction rates and quality had been excellent, and of major importance were reports that over-the-row harvesters had worked successfully in a wide range of environments.

Soil Surveyors and Practitioners Conference

Amanda Schapel attended the Soil Surveyors and Practitioners Conference on October 9-10. The purpose of the conference was to bring together soil surveyors from across Australia to discuss a number of issues including guidelines for detailed soil surveys in the Murray Darling Basin and to participate in discussions of topics of interest and those that had been raised by the conference.

From the conference it has been decided to form an association to deal with creating codes and guidelines for soil surveyors to follow and to write a chapter in the Australian Soil and Land Survey Handbook specifically for "Intensive survey for irrigation" a topic which has never before been addressed.

PEOPLE

- 3 Ben Robinson has recently been appointed to the Plant Breeders Rights Advisory Committee by the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. This committee provides advice to the Minister on various issues relating to the functions of the Plant Breeders Rights Office. He attended his first meeting on the 17th November.
- 3 Charles Drew is National Vice President of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (AIAST) for 2003/04.
- 3 Amanda Schapel is on the interim Committee of Soil Surveyors and Practitioners to develop uniform code and guidelines for soil surveyors.
- 3 *Overseas Travel*
Prue McMichael and her family are spending December and January in Europe, Egypt, and USA. We are all rather envious.



3 Wedding Bells

Congratulations goes to our Technical Officer, Lucy Pumpa (nee Thompson), who married John Pumpa in a traditional ceremony at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide on 20th September.

REMINDERS

The following reminders may jog your memory about things that you have talked about but have not yet done.

Soil Sampling Workshops

The importance of collecting the right samples for soil analysis has been cast into the spotlight this year as we have had a number of samples that have been taken in the wrong position in the vineyard/orchard or at the wrong depth. This has led to interpretation of the data being difficult or impossible.

If there is any interest for a workshop/s to be held to address soil sampling techniques for a number of questions or reasons could you please contact Amanda Schapel on either (08) 8373 2488 or email: amanda@srhs.com.au

For further information on correct sampling techniques see our article in *The Australian & New Zealand Grapegrower and Winemaker*, November 2003, p40-43.

Is it time to Check Where Your Roots Are?

As we are coming in to the warmer part of the season we are thinking more of our irrigation scheduling. It may be time to find out where your vine roots have grown in the soil profile. Positioning a few soil pits in the vine row will enable you to see how deep the roots have grown, if there is an impervious layer preventing the roots from growing further, or to see how moist the soil is.

If you are interested in doing this please contact Amanda Schapel on either (08) 8373 2488 or email: amanda@srhs.com.au.

Tissue Analysis

Petiole analysis is completed in most grapegrowing areas and the interpretations are now being made on the results by Ben Robinson and Ben Thomas.

The time for tissue sampling and analysis for almonds, olives and citrus fall in January and February. Contact Amanda or Lucy well ahead of time to ensure that they send you sample bags and questionnaire forms.



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year
from everyone at Scholefield Robinson!