

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter!

At this time of the year we all look back at the season just finished to review our performance and look forward to see what lessons learned in the previous season can drive change in our way of doing things for next season.

Ÿ The winegrape industry has experienced a mixed year with good crops, but lower prices for growers, and more demand from wineries for specific quality specifications. The sudden, extreme heatwave in mid February caused fruit and vine damage in some regions.

Ÿ Although it is sometimes difficult, growers need to try and match the market specifications as much as possible, develop a good working relationship with the buyer of their product, and if possible, combine with other growers of similar philosophy to collectively market yourselves and your products. Sounds easy, doesn't it!

Ÿ Irrigators who are dependent on the Murray Darling system for water (and most are) will be anxiously looking at rainfall over the next three months and the water in upstream storages. I am sure plans are in place to re-impose water restrictions if storages are low at the start of the irrigation season.

Ÿ News of several large new almond developments east of Mildura are an indication of the continued confidence in this expanding industry.

MAJOR PROJECT WORK

Dried Grape Growers Training Project

Scholefield Robinson has completed a contract to develop a training program for dried grape growers. This project was funded by Farmbis and the Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, and was proposed by the Australian Dried Fruits Association (ADFA). River Murray Training, of Berri, South Australia, worked with the Scholefield Robinson team. There were two components of the project;

Ÿ to develop an industry training strategy, and

Ÿ to prepare a grower training program including manuals and workbooks for presentation to growers.

The program will now be further developed as a pilot in 2004/05.

Legal Cases in Viticulture

Garth Swinburn has been involved as an expert in a number of legal cases in viticulture this season, including spray damage to fruit and excessive canopy burn from new vine covers in table grapes as well as poor performing vines. These cases highlight the need for growers to carefully assess their management inputs to reduce crop loss. It also highlights the need for industry based R&D projects to help growers assess production risks.

In our Adelaide office, Prudence Honner has been engaged to provide independent viticultural assessments for a number of growers and wineries in order to settle contractual quality and pricing disputes. Charles Drew has also worked with a number of growers/wineries to try and resolve disputes over contract issues.

Impact of Drought and Water Restrictions on Irrigators in Riverland

Stuart Pettigrew and Peter Scholefield have been involved in a joint project with EconSearch looking at the impacts of the drought and water restrictions which were put in place in the 2003/2004 growing season. This project is funded by PIRSA and includes face to face interviews with 35 growers across a number of industries in the Riverland. With possible water restrictions on the agenda for 2004/05 this project is very topical.

Winegrape Quality Assessment

Prudence Honner has continued her quality benchmark work in 2004 with a number of growers across the Adelaide Hills and McLaren Vale. This work has helped growers to better understand which characteristics influence grape and wine quality in the field.

In our Mildura office, the AusIndustry funded project on winegrape quality has progressed well this season under the direction of Angela Herridge, with around 80 vineyard blocks being assessed for fruit quality and some small batch winemaking being done by our research partner, Provisor.

Expert Reports for Table Grape and Citrus Developments

Garth Swinburn prepared expert reports for Product Disclosure Statements (PDS) for two large developments for table grapes and citrus. These developments were in the Surraysia and Riverland region and used up-to-date varieties and production technology.

McLaren Vale Vineyard Irrigation Workshops

Prudence Honner, Peter Scholefield and Amanda Schapel were involved in the presentation of a series of vineyard irrigation workshops in McLaren Vale, with sessions 2 and 3 held in January (veraison) and March (harvest). Over 100 growers attended the sessions.

Vineyard Acidification Project

In our Christmas newsletter, we highlighted that Scholefield Robinson obtained funding from Land and Water Australia to undertake a project which looked at the way irrigation water and fertigation can affect the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of the soil under drippers in vineyards.

This project has now been completed and as you may have seen, we have published several articles related to the project in the grape and viticultural industry press. Copies of the final

report and acidity calculator developed as part of the project are available for download from Land and Water Australia www.lwa.gov.au.

During the course of the study, Richard Merry, who was also part of the team, developed a model which can help predict whether soils will become more acid or alkaline, and how fast the changes occur. The model uses the sort of information that many growers will have in their filing cabinets, including yield, soil and water test values, together with data on irrigation and fertigation inputs.

If you are interested, please contact Ben Thomas at our Adelaide office on (08) 8373 2488 or email: ben.thomas@srhs.com.au

Assessment of Losses Due to Fires

While the causes of the bushfires at Long Plains (between Dublin and Mallala), Price (Yorke Peninsula) and north of Padthaway are still unclear, Charles Drew has been engaged by solicitors to assess losses resulting from the fires and to negotiate acceptable compensation with those affected. The Long Plains fire affected 17 different farms or residents, the Price fire affected 7, and the Padthaway fire affected almost 30 different farms or businesses.

Losses included the results of some heat damage to vines in the Padthaway fire and a substantial amount of pea straw destined to be packaged for the home garden market which was burnt in the Price fire. Most of the other losses incurred were grain crops, stubble or pasture for livestock, fences and trees. Some livestock was also burnt in the Padthaway fire. An interesting problem in both the Price and Long Plains fire is how to estimate any losses caused by increased susceptibility to wind and water erosion given that organic matter protecting the soil from erosion was burnt. This is one consequence of the increased adoption of minimum till farming. Negotiations in these projects are ongoing.



NEW Mildura Office!

Scholefield Robinson Mildura has recently moved offices to 101A Ninth Street, corner of Lemon Avenue and Ninth Street. (Our telephone and postal address details have not changed.) We invite any clients to drop by and have a chat with Garth and Angela.

SERVICES TO CORPORATE CLIENTS

Breadth of Services Available

Scholefield Robinson is seen by some as a company that only provides technical advice on soils/tissue analysis, and fertiliser recommendations. We do much more than this and the breadth of skills of our consultants is reflected in the work we do.

Some of the services provided to corporate clients are:

• Diagnostic reviews and strategy development.

• Annual reviews, including benchmarking.

• Business recovery.

• Alternative dispute resolution and litigation support.

Check our website (www.srhs.com.au) or call us to discuss further.

OTHER NEWS

Topworking and Grafting Over to New Varieties

As the supply and demand situation in the wine industry continues to tighten, the resultant drop in grape prices has caused a number of growers to reassess the value of the varieties they grow.

Topworking to a new variety is often seen as a "quick fix" to change the varietal mix with only 1 year of production lost.

As a number of our clients have discussed their intention to topwork, it is necessary to highlight some of the important steps that should be considered before proceeding. For example:

• Visual health status of current vines (any unusual symptoms).

• Age of vineyard.

• Own roots or rootstock?

• Virus testing to establish current virus status (and therefore suitability for grafting).

• Quality of new variety scion material - is it certified planting material?

Please contact Prudence Honner at our Adelaide office if you are considering grafting and would like to discuss the suitability of your vines for topworking.

International Speaker

Ben Robinson was invited to present two papers at a Soil Environment and Vine Nutrition Symposium as part of the Annual Conference of the American Society for Enology and Viticulture in San Diego, California in late June.

His papers were:

• Critical plant tissue values and application of viticultural standards for practical use in vineyards.

• Practical methods of managing saline and sodic soils.

Well done Ben! It must be satisfying to be recognised internationally as an expert in your field.

OECD Farm Subsidies

A report by the OECD released on the 10th June looked at farm policies for all OECD countries. It might interest clients to know that, according to this report, Australia provided just over \$US 1 billion in subsidies to our farmers, which equates to 4% of total earnings. Sounds like a lot of money, until we compare it to the US that provided almost \$US 38 billion for their farmers, or 18% of farm incomes. However, they can claim to be way behind in the subsidies game compared to the EU that provided over \$US 121 billion in subsidies, or 37% of all farm incomes!

The best country of the OECD was New Zealand with subsidies at only 2% of farm incomes, and the worst was Switzerland with subsidies at 74% of farm incomes! It should be noted that no South American countries and very few Asian countries are in the OECD, so no figures were available for them. The full report is available on the OECD website: www.oecd.org

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.

W Stuart Pettigrew and Garth Swinburn attended the Australian Citrus Growers Annual Conference, April 18-20 (Mildura). This was a good opportunity to catch up with lots of clients and industry contacts and to gain up-to-date information on the citrus industry, including ongoing research trials.

W Stuart Pettigrew also attended the Irrigation Association of Australia Conference, May 11-13 (Adelaide). The conference highlighted new irrigation practices from both Australia and overseas, as well as technology products for the horticulture industry.

W Prudence Honner and Charles Drew attended an industry presentation organised by Bayer CropScience to hear Dr Alfons Sagenmuller discuss developments in EurepGAP® and other compliance systems relevant to horticultural produce in Europe and Asia, as well as other regulatory initiatives in the E.U.

W Ben Thomas and Charles Drew attended the River Murray - Challenges and Opportunities symposium May 14 (Adelaide). This symposium, brought together growers, consultants, scientists and policy makers to discuss the future of the River Murray. The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Peter Cullen (Adelaide Thinker in Residence).

W Charles Drew attended the 2004 National conference of the Institute of Arbitrators and Mediators Australia, May 21-23 (Sydney). A particularly interesting presentation was "Decision Making: Our innate process and Mediation" which was extremely relevant to understanding decisions by producers and farm and natural resource managers regarding whether to adopt new technology or make changes to management systems. Charles would be happy to discuss any of these papers if they are of interest.

W There will be an exodus of our consultants to the Wine Industry Technical Conference in Melbourne in late July. Prue McMichael will be presenting a poster for NVHSC. The sessions sound interesting.

PEOPLE

New Consultant

Scholefield Robinson welcomes Stuart Pettigrew, our new Tree Crops Consultant at our Adelaide office. Stuart began his career working in pest and disease management across southern Australia. Whilst this was predominantly in citrus, nut and vine crops, it also included crops as diverse as asparagus and cut flowers. Specialising into winegrapes led to Stuart taking up a position as vineyard manager in McLaren Vale. He then worked with irrigation, weather monitoring and disease forecasting Australia-wide for Agrilink from bases in Adelaide and Queensland. After a short time as an independent horticultural consultant working in Queensland, Stuart joined Scholefield Robinson in February 2004. IPM, irrigation management and Precision Horticulture remain his primary areas of interest.



New Technical Officer

Scholefield Robinson also welcomes Angela Herridge, our new Technical Officer at our Mildura office. Angela is a recent graduate from Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga and has experience in the Hunter Valley and Surraysia.

Angela joined the Mildura office to specifically work with Garth Swinburn to develop a quality benchmarking model for the Surraysia area. She will be responsible for vineyard observations and fruit quality assessments in the field and with small scale winemaking techniques.

New President!

Congratulations to Charles Drew, who has recently been appointed National President of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (IAIST).

Our philosophy at Scholefield Robinson is that we have a responsibility to put something back into the profession that we are part of.

TAFE Course Advisory Panel

Prudence Honner has been asked to be a member of the Course Advisory Panel established for the review and reaccreditation of the Diploma of Viticulture Management offered through TAFE SA.

Baby News!

Ben Thomas and his wife Nicole were pleased to announce the arrival of their first child, Molly Edith Thomas on the 19th May, 2004, weighing 3.3 kg (7 lb 4 oz).



Engagement!

Congratulations to Prudence Honner who recently became engaged to her long-time boyfriend, John Wilson. Their wedding is planned for early next year.

REMINDERS

Irrigation Reviews

With the irrigation season over for another year, now is the time to audit irrigation systems and review programs for the past year while there is plenty of time to make changes before the next irrigation season. Contact Stuart Pettigrew for more information.

Terms of Engagement 2004/05

Our Terms of Engagement are updated regularly, the last revision being 30th June, 2004. If you would like a current copy, please contact the office.

Our Privacy Policy

Scholefield Robinson Horticultural Services Pty Ltd respects your privacy and is committed to protecting your personal information.

Our database contains your name, position, company and business contact details. This information is used only for billing purposes or general mail outs of items we believe may be of interest to you or your company.

Details from our database will not be supplied to any other company or individual without your express written permission.

To help us keep our records up to date, we have enclosed a form you can complete and fax back to us if your contact details have changed, or if you no longer wish to receive our marketing material.