

# Scholefield Robinson

## HORTICULTURAL SERVICES

# Newsletter

JULY 2003

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter!

### NEW OFFICE!

We have moved in!! 118a Glen Osmond Road is operational!



SRHS moved into new premises in Parkside in April and after a few hiccups with broadband connections, telephone lines and kitchen/lab furniture, we are now on the road.

We occupy the whole first floor of the building and the reception and library is located on part of the ground floor. Parking is at the rear of the building and access is via Davey Street. Please drop in and say hello! We also plan to hold some social functions to celebrate the major upgrade in our office arrangements.

On a sad note, we had a farewell "wake" at Birdwood Street after spending 13 years there. The stories told were very good and they got better as the evening progressed.

### MAJOR PROJECTS

#### Bud Fruitfulness Assessment 2003

This season, our bud dissection service has again created a great deal of interest. After a couple of vintages with below average yields, growers have found that the results greatly assist them to plan their pruning strategies and also to confirm the strategies they already have in place for the coming season.



We have received both wine grape and table grape samples from a number of regions including the Adelaide Hills, McLaren Vale, Limestone Coast, Clare Valley, Barossa Valley, Riverland, Adelaide Plains and Western Australia. Overall, vine fruitfulness appears to be slightly higher than last season. However, significant differences in fruitfulness between blocks of the same variety from the same region highlight the need for individual blocks to be examined.

Thanks to all our clients who used this service this year, and we hope you have a very fruitful season!

#### Quality Benchmarking for Winegrapes

Prudence Honner has continued working with a number of our winegrape clients in the Adelaide Hills/Southern Vales/Fleurieu Peninsula regions to investigate vine-fruit relationships in the field and their implications on wine quality. Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot have been benchmarked again this season with some interesting results.

Garth Swinburn has 130 blocks of grapes registered in his benchmarking group, including Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot. Over the winter months we will be examining the yield/fruit quality relationships and looking at factors such as berry colour, berry weight and crop load, and how they compare within the group.

#### Herb Industry Study

RIRDC recently commissioned SRHS to prepare a discussion paper on the issues affecting the development of the Australian Culinary Herb Growers' Association.

Like many small industries, herb growers are struggling with managing an industry association with limited funds and voluntary labour. The shortage of registered chemicals for minor herb crops is the highest priority for the industry.

#### Soil Testing

The first six months of 2003 has seen a marked increase in the number of soil analyses conducted for our clients through our Adelaide office. In addition to the normal topsoil nutritional analyses, many clients had a subsoil sample analysed and this provided some very useful information. In particular, sodicity and salinity of the subsoil often differed from that of the topsoil and led to advice from our consultants that addressed both the topsoil and subsoil results rather than the topsoil results alone.



To discuss soil testing, please contact Ben Thomas or Amanda Schapel at our Adelaide office.

#### Vineyard Cooling Literature Review

We recently conducted a comprehensive review of existing research into the cooling of vineyards and orchards, and how it may pertain to the warm inland areas of Sunraysia and the Riverland. Research has demonstrated that grape colour (anthocyanins) declines when berry temperatures are sustained at high levels (above 35°C) for long periods of time. Lowering these peak temperatures results in more desirable berry composition, including berry colour, acid and pH levels. Trial work has shown that by using overhead sprinklers intermittently during

the hot part of the day the plant temperatures are reduced by around 8-15°C. In these situations the low output sprinklers need to be activated every 15 minutes to maintain the lower temperatures. It was estimated that in this region, based on historic climatic data, sprinklers would have to be running a total of 50-80 hours per (normal) season, resulting in an additional 1-1.6ML of water for cooling only. In these times when more efficient water usage in horticulture is being encouraged, we would have to closely consider the practical implications for this management tool for improving wine grape quality.

#### Due Diligence of Horticultural Projects

We have carried out horticultural audits or due diligences on a number of winegrape, table grape, olive, almond, and stone fruit projects for major investment houses. Our senior consultants have applied their high level analytical skills and experience to meet the challenges of this complex work, which has also given them professional fulfilment.

#### Bud Fruitfulness Workshops

An increase in awareness of bud fruitfulness and bud necrosis has occurred after two consecutive low yielding seasons for many of our winegrape clients. As a result, SRHS has seen the need to share the knowledge acquired after providing a bud fruitfulness service to clients over the last decade. A number of our consultants have been involved in regional seminars to discuss results, practical approaches in the vineyard, as well as feedback from "real" vineyards over the last two seasons. Some of the seminars we have been involved in include:

- Adelaide Hills Wine Region Bud Fruitfulness "Post Mortem"
- Pruning & Bud Fruitfulness Workshop for SE Clients



Prudence Honner & Lucy Thompson presenting at the Pruning & Bud Fruitfulness Workshop for SE clients.

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## Grape and Wine Extension Review

Charles Drew recently completed this Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation (GWRDC) project in March and the final report is being used by GWRDC as a basis for developing their investment strategy for extension. He presented some of the findings at a planning workshop for NSW viticulture extension, held at the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

## Vineyard Acidification Audit

We are currently working on obtaining funding approval for a Vineyard Acidification Audit from Land and Water Australia. The objective of this project is to provide a preliminary assessment of the nature and potential risk of extreme soil pH (both acidification and alkalisation) occurring in viticultural regions of Australia.

If potential risks for extreme pH conditions are proved by this project, then subsequent work may need to be undertaken by industry to determine the best means of responding to that threat (eg. via research, extension or policy initiatives).

## Dispute Resolution

Charles Drew has been retained by a large mining company with extensive gas interests to assist in negotiations with a coastal landholder where an easement through the property has been required. The easement was necessary firstly for a permanent buried pipeline and secondly to allow fabrication of substantial lengths of pipeline to be connected to the gas rig some kilometres off shore.

## STAFF NEWS

### Ben Thomas - New Consultant

Many of you will have spoken to our new staff member, Ben Thomas, who joined our Adelaide office in February. He is a graduate of the University of Adelaide with a research interest in soil chemistry and plant nutrition. Ben has expertise in soil chemistry, soil biology and plant nutrition and is equipped to provide expert advice on fertiliser management, soil management issues and crop production for a range of plant species.



### Charles Drew

Charles was elected National Vice President of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (AIAST) for 2003-04 at their AGM in May 2003. He is a member of their 6 person Council Management Committee.

He is also a member of the Australian Association of Agricultural Consultants (AAAC) National Committee for Continuing Professional Development and is focussing on accreditation for consultants in agriculture and natural resource management.

## Amanda Schapel

We are pleased to announce that in February Amanda became a registered consultant member of the Australian Association of Agricultural Consultants (AAAC).

## Overseas Travels

Garth Swinburn and Prudence Honner are visiting California in the next few months.

Garth is attending the SunWorld Grape Expo in Bakersfield California and updating on table grape matters.

Prudence is joining a Phylloxera Board Study Tour to the main grape growing areas of California with a focus on pest & disease management.

## 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 attended so far in 2003.

- 2 Charles Drew attended the Institute of Arbitrators and Mediators Annual Symposium held in Melbourne and took part in several hands-on sessions on mediation and arbitration techniques.
- 2 Garth Swinburn attended the AFFCO World Class Workshop in Melbourne in May.
- 2 Prudence Honner attended a seminar on the assessment of wine grape maturity and aroma development. This seminar was conducted by Jacques Rousseau and presented by CRCV.
- 2 Ben Thomas and Amanda Schapel attended the Viticare Participatory On Farm Trials for Sustainable Viticulture in the Adelaide Hills.
- 2 Lucy Thompson attended a forum held in Tatura on cane sampling, bud dissection and primary bud necrosis, for bud dissection service providers from SA, Vic & NSW.

## OTHER NEWS

### Water Issues

All of our clients have been affected by water issues over the last season and water restrictions came into force in SA on July 1, 2003. Water licence allocations have been reduced by 30% in South Australia and some growers who have been efficient irrigators with enough water licence to meet the needs of the vines or trees will find that they do not have sufficient water for the 2003/04 season.

Irrigators who draw water from Lake Alexandrina are facing a particularly difficult season, not just because of water restrictions, but Lake water levels have dropped about 0.4m and further falls are expected, even with a "normal" rainfall season. Many will find that the suction lines on their pumps will be high and dry, or sucking mud. In order to dredge a channel out into a deeper area of the lake, irrigators require approvals from Council, EPA, Native Vegetation Authority, Aboriginal Heritage, and Crown Lands. Forward planning is critical to ensure smooth passage through these agencies so that the water can flow as the weather warms up.



Peter Scholefield has spoken at several grower meetings in Clare and Langhorne Creek on ways of coping with less water. A further series of meetings are planned in the Riverland in late July. The key messages to growers are:

- ⇒ know the performance of your irrigation system,
- ⇒ monitor soil moisture carefully,
- ⇒ understand the critical times in the crop cycle,
- ⇒ know the most profitable blocks on your property and if things get really bad, use your water on these.

## Importance of Record-Keeping

Our legal and insurance work continues to highlight the importance of record keeping at all levels within the horticultural community - from growers, resellers and consultants, to contract spray applicators, contract labour, and everyone involved in an export chain.

SRHS is frequently asked to assemble information, advise on potential losses, coordinate teams of experts, and to independently brief others in horticultural practices. Each of the SRHS consultants has been involved in providing expert reports for plant and produce quality disputes, crop outturn problems and storage and handling issues, market contracts, pest and disease introductions and management issues and/or personal injury cases related to lost opportunities for earnings from horticulture. In each case the assembly of information and evidence is critical. It is also a very time-consuming activity if records have not been kept. For example, in recent cases, involving *planting material quality* it has been necessary to accumulate information on the source of material, practices of the provider nursery, pre-plant appearance and test results, pre- and post-plant soil, weather and water conditions, photographic evidence and quantitative evidence on performance of the material in question and the same material planted elsewhere. From such information it has been possible to provide an opinion on the likely cause and the potential short- and long-term losses.

The early involvement of SRHS as independent advisors in such cases has benefited the clients, some of whom have realised early on that their records will be insufficient to support a claim; while others have been able to prepare material for the engaged experts, thereby saving money and time.

## John Edstrom

John Edstrom, Cooperative Extension Adviser for Colusa County in Northern California, is spending four months sabbatical leave in Australia looking at applied viticultural research. John is better known for his almond expertise and SRHS has been hosting him while he is in Adelaide.

## Website

[www.srhs.com.au](http://www.srhs.com.au)

Our website is regularly updated with news and information. Be sure to check out our *monthly articles* section. Our current article, written by Prudence Honner, talks about Oedema in grapevines. (Go to the "Downloads" section and click on "Articles").