

Winter Newsletter

JULY 2002

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter for 2002. It seems as though the vintage has only just finished and almond blossoms are just around the corner. The next mad cycle of the horticultural calendar will be starting soon. Your reaction to the snippets of news in our last newsletter has been favourable and we are continuing with the same format. We also are updating our website with articles that are prepared for industry publications. Please check them out.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE THIS YEAR?

Ø Bud Fruitfulness Season 2002

Our bud fruitfulness dissection service for grapevines has been very successful again this year with many of our clients taking advantage of this early tool for yield management. After a very cool summer and low yields, mostly related to low temperatures during set, we have all been left wondering whether bud initiation has been affected. Growers will be pleased to know that based on what we have seen this season fruitfulness generally does not appear to be greatly affected. Managers should be aware however that when considering their individual blocks regional or broad sweeping statements hold little value. Factors such as light penetration into the canopy, nutrition and vigour play a role in determining fruitfulness and will be very different across a region due to the multitude of variables that play a part in vineyard management. Dissection of dormant buds gives managers additional information which when added to their knowledge of the block can aid greatly in making pruning decisions.

Ø Increase in Legal Expert Work

All senior SRHS consultants are receiving increasing numbers of requests to provide expert opinions on legal cases. They range from; weedicide damage to vineyards, to losses to horticulturists as a result of vehicle accidents.

Ø Vineyard Soil Tests

Soil pits were dug in a number of vineyards to investigate the world "under the ground" and provide some directions for soil and irrigation management.

Ø Olive Work Continues to Increase

SRHS consultants are advising a number of large olive projects on technical matters.

Ø Crisis Management in Horticulture Seminars

Seminars were recently held in the Riverland and Sunraysia to present to an audience of lawyers, accountants and bankers some of the tools that SRHS has to help cope with crisis management in horticulture. There was good interest in this topic from attendees.

Ø The Risk and Economic Impact of Phylloxera in South Australia's Viticultural Regions

This joint study by SRHS with EconSearch assessed the relative probability of an outbreak of phylloxera in the regions and estimated the likely economic impact of the outbreak. The final report was received by the Phylloxera Board in late March. Over a 20 year period after an outbreak it is estimated that for individual vineyards:

- Profitability would reduce by from 23% (Robe/Mt Benson) to 56% (Riverland).
- Capital expenditure would increase from 17% (Riverland) to 25% (Padthaway).

Over a 10 year period after an outbreak the estimated impact on two regions were:

- McLaren Vale \$35m, 145 job losses.
- Coonawarra \$49m, 112 job losses.

Ø Review of WGCA

A review of the Winegrape Growers' Council of Australia has been completed. It recommends that the major focus of the peak industry body becomes viticultural issues, and that membership be extended to represent winery-owned vineyards and non member states (WA, Qld, Tas) and non member regions of Victoria, NSW and SA. It also recommends that the specific interests of independent winegrape growers be catered for by a special interest group serviced by the new body and that a longer term aim was a single peak industry body for the wine and grape industries throughout Australia. The recommendations in the report were accepted by the majority of the January Council meeting of the WGCA, and the strategy for implementation is being developed. The report can be accessed on the GWRDC website.

Ø Extension Review (in progress)

The first stage of a review of extension in the grape and wine industry for the Grape and Wine R&D Corporation has begun, and consultations have been conducted in Sydney, Canberra, Wagga Wagga and Melbourne. Consultations in WA and the Sunraysia and Riverland are planned. The overall project is to develop a strategic plan for extension to guide the priorities for investment by the GWRDC.

Ø Onion Levy

Scholefield Robinson worked with the onion industry to prepare a submission to the government for the introduction of a R&D levy on onion production. The process was complex but we are pleased to report it was successful. The legislation has passed and the levy commenced July 1, 2002.

Ø Alternative Dispute Resolution

Charlie Drew presented a paper on Alternative Dispute Resolution in Agriculture to the SA Chapter of the Institute of Arbitrators and Mediators on 18th April.

Ø Viticultural Review of Grape Investment Projects

SRHS was engaged to review several grape projects for a leading investment house.

Ø Grape Quality Assessment

SRHS has continued to work closely with winegrape clients to increase understanding of the influence vine-fruit relationships have on wine quality. The increase in understanding will allow better decision making in the field where vine performance can be manipulated to achieve targeted quality specifications.



Prudence Honner assessing Shiraz bunches as part of a quality management project in McLaren Vale.

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Ø National Vine Health Steering Committee (NVHSC)

Prue McMichael and the SRHS admin team continue to provide a Secretariat service to NVHSC, a body with representatives from all state and federal agencies with an interest in vine health matters. The discovery of leaf rust is an example of one of the issues presented to NVHSC for discussion and advice on approaches to minimise the impact on the Australian grape and wine industry. Other than regular meetings of NVHSC, we have provided support to workshops on Clean Planting Material and Restricted Spring Growth. A review of virus research was also carried out for GWRDC.

Ø Benchmarking Groups

Scholefield Robinson Mildura has had a successful season with its wine grape quality benchmarking groups. The quality of grapes in the Riverland and Sunraysia regions was outstanding with some parcels of fruit nearly off our quality scale. SRM intend to expand the benchmarking groups in the Mildura area to allow a greater set of data for comparison of Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot grapes. As we gather more information on these varieties we can then start to focus on the real issues of wine grape quality, such as yield levels, harvest dates, berry colour, berry size, pruning practices, rootstocks and soil effects, etc.

BUILDING OUR SKILLS

All professional staff at Scholefield Robinson continue to build and improve their skills and knowledge.

Ø Conferences, Seminars and Field Days:

- Peter, Garth & Charlie attended the Sunraysia Field Days.
- Garth & Prudence both attended the "Research to Practice: Quality Management" workshop at Mildura and Cobdogla respectively.
- A Business Seminar on "Strategic Planning for Growth" was held in April by BDO Chartered Accountants & Advisers, which was attended by Dan.
- Peter Scholefield attended a 2 day workshop on Managing Interpersonal Relationships. We will watch with interest to see what happens!!

SAD NEWS

Ann Robinson, Ben's wife, died on June 19 after a long battle with cancer. Ann had provided Ben and Peter with much support and encouragement for SRHS activities, particularly in the early few years of our existence. I am sure you will join with all of us in offering Ben, Ella and Penny our condolences on their loss.

IT'S A BOY!

For those who haven't heard, Amanda Schapel gave birth to a son "Nicholas Aiden" on 31st December, 2001. Amanda was overheard saying recently that her life wouldn't be the same again.

LOCAL NEWS

Ø Grower/Winery Relations

There has been considerable deterioration in grapegrower/winery relations over the 2002 vintage, despite very good quality in the warmer production areas. Increased overall production, a late start to season, and capacity problems in wineries, have led to delays in harvesting beyond optimum maturity and even some rejection of sound fruit from contracted growers. However, some wineries are still providing contracts for specific varieties in preferred regions. These contracts seem to be easier to obtain by existing contract growers wanting to expand their plantings rather than new growers without previous experience. I recently saw some 8-10 year old Cabernet Sauvignon vines being pushed out to plant almonds.

Ø Incentives for Irrigators

Generous financial incentives are available to irrigators in the Mallee area of Victoria for:

- Irrigation planning (up to 75% rebate).
 - Irrigation monitoring;
 - test wells (100% rebate),
 - scheduling equipment (25% rebate),
 - scheduling services (50% rebate year 1, 25% rebate year 2).
- Upper limits apply.

Ø Olives

A new over-the-row mechanical harvester for olives has been working in orchards across Australia. The Gregoire machine is a large version of a grape harvester.



"Guess the height of the olive tree?"

OVERSEAS NEWS

The following significant news items were recently reported in "Willard Thompson Field Talk". Field Talk is a weekly e-newsletter published by Rincon Publishing in California (also publishers of California Grower magazine). To subscribe, go to: www.rinconpublishing.com

Ø Olive Growers Face Reality Of Infestation

Olive fruit fly was discovered in Napa, Marin and Sonoma counties last year and the state has pronounced an irreversible infestation, thus declining to spend any funds on eradication. New to California in 1998, the olive fruit fly is now in all olive growing areas, threatening the \$32 million crop grown on 25,000 acres in the state.

Ø Plant More Broccoli

Several months back Field Talk reported on the cancer-fighting effects of sulforaphane, a chemical found in broccoli and concentrated in broccoli sprouts. Now comes a follow up study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science that reports sulforaphane actually kills helicobacter pylori, bacteria that cause stomach ulcers and cancers. It isn't clear how much broccoli or sprouts a person would need to eat in order to benefit from the anti-cancer properties but the researchers believe the quantities are reasonable. The grape industry may benefit from a recent study (carried out by researchers at USDA-ARS) that says a second chemical in grapes – pterostillbene – has a cancer-preventive effect and also has anti-diabetic properties. The chemical is found in the leaves of Chardonnay and Gamay grapes and the berries of Pinot Noir and Gamey.

Ø Water Issues

Water issues seem to dominate the horticultural/agricultural industries in California as well as Australia. Some recent examples are:

- Conflict between San Diego urban users of water and agricultural users in the Imperial Irrigation District.
- A proposal to store water in aquifers in the Mojave desert and pump it out in dry years is facing opposition.

Ø Californian Fruit & Nut Crops 2002

Forecasts show almond production to be 940 million pounds (426,000 t), up 14%; while stonefruit production will be a record 62.7 million cartons.

OUR PRIVACY POLICY

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WEBSITE UPDATE

www.srhs.com.au

Our website is regularly updated with news and information. Be sure to check our NEW bi-monthly articles section. Our current article deals with pruning issues relating to winegrapes and is available now.