

Vintage 2023—Downy But Not Out

With previous Vintage 2022 done and dusted growers looked to the future in the hope of better things to come. However the outlook from wineries for Vintage 2023 was not what growers wanted to hear, especially regarding red varieties. The price of white varieties was forecast to remain stable. The oversupply of reds due to the Chinese tariffs, and supply chain constraints, led wineries to warn growers that the price of some red varieties could drop as low as \$150 p/t, and that caps on production may be imposed. This information left growers in a quandary, going forward. A few decided that mothballing in the short term was the answer, while the majority opted to grow a crop. The Bureau of Meteorology warned that La Nina would continue to impact Australia's weather, what no one at the time knew was just how big that impact would be in the Riverina for the 2022 growing season. We have regional records dating back to 1875 and in all that time the highest recorded rainfall was in 1894 with a total of 835mm, in 2022 a total of 850mm was received. So, the rainfall received in 2022 is the most in recorded history, October also broke the record for the most rain recorded during that month. To put this all in perspective the average annual rainfall for Griffith is 407mm. Increased rainfall along with warmer than average minimum temperatures, and lower than average maximum temperatures resulted in increased disease pressure especially in regard to downy mildew, as well delaying the expected start to vintage. The biggest hit for the season came on the night of the 23 October when the heavens opened, the next morning saw the results of around 100ml of rainfall causing widespread inundation across the region. Many growers were unable to access their vineyards to apply needed fungicide sprays, in some cases vineyards remained wet for several weeks causing widespread crop loss due to downy mildew infection that could not be controlled. December 2022 and the start of 2023 so far have resulted in more usual climatic conditions for the area. Vintage started late with only 305 tonnes being picked by the 6 Feb. As a reference we usually have between 50,000 & 100,000

tonnes picked by this time. Growers are reporting that most crops are down well below average, with the only accurate yield estimate coming by way of the harvester, due to variation within the block caused by crop loss related to downy mildew. As we approach the end of vintage, we believe that the local crop will be down by between 40-50%. It looks like the worst year on record for growers with low crops, low prices, and a higher number of inputs, due to the unseasonal conditions.



Combined with inflated prices of inputs, fuel, and labour it paints a grim picture. That being said the early reports of the grapes that have been delivered suggest that the fruit is good quality, and growers being the resilient people they are hoping that the reduction in this year's crop will help bring things back into balance.

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BOARD ACTIVITIES REPORT



**Riverina
WINEGRAPE
GROWERS**

Bruno Brombal and Robert Bellato appointed

Bruno Brombal has again been reappointed as the Chair of the Board. He has held this position since 1998. Robert Bellato was also reappointed as the Deputy Chair of the organisation.

Tony Baggio will continue to represent winegrape growers in irrigation matters, and Jeremy Cass represents the region at the NSW Wine Industry, Bruno Altin is the delegate to the Riverina Winemakers Association, Steve Barbon is the delegate to MIA Vine Improvement Society, and Bruno Brombal continues as delegate to the Inland Wine Regions Alliance.

Grape Sampling

Winegrape maturity testing and colour sampling has commenced at the Board office. Each year our laboratory does tests (free for members) on the maturity and colour of your grapes. So please feel free to drop in a sample for testing.

Variable Message Board

Growers will hopefully notice the variable message boards in the region alerting people to the commencement of vintage. These have been used for the past years as a means of educating the local community so that they modify their driving behaviour around the winegrape trucks.

VERT—Viticultural Emergency Response Training

Biosecurity has been on the radar with the Varroa Mite incursion and the threats of Foot and Mouth And Lumpy Skin Disease. One of the lessons that the Varroa mite incursion taught us was the need for trained staff to be available if and when an incursion takes place.

Several years ago NSW DPI hosted Operation Sour Grapes for the NSW Wine Industry, this was a mock phylloxera outbreak designed to educate industry personnel of the full implications, if such a case eventuated. This process was an eye opener for all attendees, especially participants engaged in Agri tourism as part of their wine business. The offshoot was the development of VERT, with the first course rolled out in January 2023. The aim of VERT is to have industry personnel trained and ready to go in the case of a biosecurity outbreak, be that Phylloxera, or some other exotic pest of grape vines. The plan is to have 200 industry people trained in the next couple of years, these people then provide a pool of people that NSW DPI can draw upon for a fast response in the case of an outbreak. The need for trained personnel was highlighted during the Varroa Mite outbreak, with the NSW DPI having to co-opt in bee keepers to help cover the ground. This was the first round of Vert training, where the system was put to the test and fine tuned by the participants so that



further courses could be rolled out to interested industry people in the future. The training took place at the Orange Agricultural Institute, the same venue that hosted operation Sour Grapes with the added bonus of an updated facility fit for purpose. Once the training was complete the wall partition was opened to reveal the war room where both the Varroa Mite outbreak as well as natural disasters events were being monitored. An amazing facility to have in a regional city, especially when a fast response is required. While we all hope that it will never have to be used, it's great that we have it and a plan just in case.

New Biosecurity Signs for the Riverina and NSW



awareness and protect so many of our livelihoods.” NSW Minister for Agriculture Dugald Saunders said movement of phylloxera was most likely caused by immature insects, known as crawlers, which can be easily transported on clothing, footwear, equipment, vehicles and in soil and vine materials.

“The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is taking the strongest possible approach to keeping

The NSW Government will install 65 new biosecurity signs across the State’s 16 wine regions to keep our world-class vineyards phylloxera free.

Phylloxera are very small aphid-like insects that are regarded as the world’s worst grapevine pest. Nationals candidate for Murray Peta Betts welcomes the announcement, warning an incursion would devastate the region’s wine production and the people it employs.

“We produce some of the finest wine in the world in the Griffith area, so it is no surprise we have seen a sharp increase in visitors to our vineyards,” Ms Betts said.

“With these visitors comes the inevitable threat of a biosecurity pest incursion like Phylloxera that can spread easily and destroy our vines quickly.”

“We’re also in close proximity to Victoria which already has six Phylloxera infested zones, so there’s a risk the pest could come in on machinery operated by contractors.

That’s why these signs are so important to raise

our primary industries safe, including our grape sector, which contributes \$14 billion to the NSW economy annually,” Mr Saunders said.

“These new signs will not only make visitors aware of the threat of phylloxera, it will also alert them to the biosecurity measures vineyards have in place like washing shoes or not entering certain parts of their properties.”

Minister for Regional Transport and Roads Sam Faraway said it was critical people travelling through wine production areas understood and respected the rules.

“The roadside signs will be placed strategically across NSW’s 16 wine regions to maximise their visibility and impact,” Mr Faraway said.

“Transport for NSW, NSW Department of Primary Industries and the NSW Wine Industry Association are working together to protect our viticulture industry from phylloxera, which would seriously jeopardise the 490 million bottles of wine we produce every year.”

For more information on the state’s viticulture industry, visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/grapes

NSW Wine Industry Under 35 Network Conference 25-26 May 2023

Calling wine industry legends. The Rootlings Network (NSW Wine Industry U35) would like to invite you to attend the 2023 Rootlings Network Conference on Thursday and Friday 25-26 May in Orange NSW.

Who should attend?

Anyone under 35 working in any role across the NSW Wine Industry that wants to meet others, build networks and broaden their industry knowledge and skills.

To attend you must be a member of the Rootlings Network if not please join here:

<https://therootlingsnetwork.mn.co>

Why you should attend?

- Network with people across a broad range of industry jobs
- Develop professional skills
- Understand career opportunities in the industry
- Opportunity to learn and ask questions of leading industry experts

- Experience the best of Orange hospitality and food

What is covered in the conference?

Breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided on the Thursday and Morning tea and lunch will be provided on the Friday. Transport throughout the conference will also be provided. The cost is \$20 inc GST per person however all participants coming from outside Orange will receive a travel bursary between \$100-\$150 to cover some travel and accommodation costs.

Anyone wishing to attend this event, please contact Jeremy Cass at Riverina Winegrape Growers on 0427759094 or jcass@wgmb.net.au as RWG are willing to help with accommodation and conference costs

Ladies on the land Morning Tea

On 14 February, St Valentines Day, Riverina Winegrape Growers in conjunction with Griffith & District Citrus Growers Association held the Ladies on the Land Morning Tea. In a two-pronged approach we wanted to celebrate the ladies for the often silent behind the scenes work that can be overlooked, and to also put a focus on mental health in our industry during these trying times. We hoped to have an event that was fun and informative, and from the feed back of ladies that attended we achieved that goal. This could not have been achieved without the help of the many sponsors and speakers. The honorable Bronnie Taylor (NSW Minister for Women, Rural ,And Mental health opened the event, and facilitate funding that covered the cost of the venue and catering. NSW Farmers provided sample bags and funding towards lucky door prizes, Yenda Producers provides funding towards lucky door prizes, the Bull & Bell restaurant provided a lucky door prize, while the local wineries donated wine for the sample bags. Bronnie opened the morning and spoke to the ladies on the strength within rural communities and the benefits of looking out for each other. Fiona Hart spoke on mental health



and provided some fun exercises for the ladies, and Sarah Groat bravely shared her story. Tim Pilkington spoke about a novel form of succession planning. All the ladies that attended took home a sample bag and one of the many lucky door prizes that ranged from gift vouchers for fine dining to chocolates in keeping with St Valentines Day. The feed back from the day was heart warming , with many emails and calls thanking us and expressing a worthwhile event. We look like making it an annual event.

NSW GOVERNMENT PLEDGES ONGOING SUPPORT FOR THE NSW WINE INDUSTRY

A re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government in NSW will invest a further \$3.8 million over four years in partnership with the State's wine industry to help it grow and prosper.

NSW Wine President Mark Bourne met yesterday with Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole in Griffith to discuss the Liberal and Nationals Government commitment to sign a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with NSW Wine. The MOU is focused on creating and maintaining a sustainable workforce, providing grape growers with access to more research and development opportunities, and boosting wine tourism in the regions.

NSW Deputy Premier Paul Toole said that "this is an investment to keep growing our State's \$14 billion wine industry and to support it to tap into new oppor-

tunities to put more locally grown wines in front of consumers here and overseas and to bring more visitors to our regions' vineyards to sample it for themselves."

NSW Minister for Agriculture Dugald Saunders added that "this is a long-term commitment to secure the future of our State's \$14 billion wine industry and the jobs and skilled workforce that it creates," Mr Saunders said.

The MOU will deepen the partnership between the NSW wine industry and the NSW Government in the areas of tourism, trade, investment, primary industries and R&D. NSW Wine looks forward to working with the incoming government to build a more resilient and sustainable wine industry for future generations.



New Cover for Riverina Winegrape Growers Carpark



With the help of a government grant we have been able to upgrade the car park behind the office with the installation of a carport and some extra concrete, turning this space into an all weather facility. The new cover will allow us to park the RWG vehicles for protection against the elements, and use this space for

mini field days and growers BBQs. The grant contributed to around 50 % of the cost of both the cover and the concrete, and Riverina Winegrape Growers will host a post vintage BBQ in late April date TBC.

Help With Hail And Flood Grants

A reminder to everyone trying to access Hail and Flood grants, free help and advice is available from the Rural Financial Counsellors please contact **Bonny Hayes** on 0447479694 bonnie@rfcsnsw.com.au Bonny has been assisting growers with these grants

on a regular basis out of our offices in Yambil street, you will need to make an appointment. Application for the hail grants have closed, while flood grant applications will remain open until June 2023, so give Bonny a call as she is happy to help.

REPORT GRAPE SPILLS

Griffith City Council

Phone 1300 176 077 Business Hours

Or 02 6969 4823 After Hours (J&J Security)

Leeton Shire Council

Phone 02 6953 0911 Anytime

Bridging The Gap—NO Buy Backs for the Murrumbidgee

The Government is beginning the process to buy water to Bridge the Gap under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. These water purchases are **voluntary**.

This water purchase is only for the **remaining 49GL of the Bridging the Gap target**.

‘Bridging the Gap’ is the largest pool of water to be recovered under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan – a total of 2,075GL. Around 49GL remains to be recovered.

Today’s announcement marks an important step forward in delivering upon the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to complete the Murray–Darling Basin Plan.

49.2 gegalitres (GL), comprised of 46 GL of surface water and 3.2 GL of groundwater, will be recovered across 7 targeted catchments in the Basin. All these catchments have remaining water to be recovered to achieve the Basin Plan’s Sustainable Diversion Limits.

The targeted catchments for purchase are:

Queensland

Condamine–Balonne catchment: 14.0 GL of surface water and 3.2 GL of groundwater

New South Wales—all Surface Water

NSW Murray catchment: 10.0 GL

Namoi catchment: 9.5 GL

NSW Border Rivers catchment: 5.1 GL

Barwon–Darling catchment: 1.6 GL

Lachlan catchment: 0.9 GL.

The Australian Government will also continue to work with the Australian Capital Territory Government to identify, plan and deliver cost-effective efficiency projects to bridge the remaining gap of 4.9 GL of surface water in this catchment.

The Strategic Water Purchasing Framework released today outlines the principles that will guide how the water will be purchased.

The Government will strategically purchase water through an open, competitive, transparent tender. An open tender will begin on **23 March** through the AusTender website.

Water licence holders who are interested in selling their water entitlements to the Australian Government are encouraged to consult with their legal and financial advisors to start gathering relevant information to support a tender application. Only offers from the targeted catchments can be considered.

When the tender is released, detailed guidance, specifications and supporting material will be released to assist water licence holders to participate. The Australian Government remains interested in receiving feasible, non-purchase-based projects that can be delivered in collaboration with the community and state governments by 30 June 2024.

To read the framework and find out more about water purchasing in the basin, visit: www.dcceew.gov.au/

ABARES report highlights the need for increased investment in market diversification

New economic modelling from ABARES indicates sustained downward pressure on red grape pricing across Australia’s key production regions of the Riverina, Riverland and Murray Darling–Swan Hill.

“This report will help businesses to make more informed decisions in the years ahead, while also highlighting the need to increase investment in diversifying our export markets” said Lee McLean, Chief Executive of Australian Grape & Wine.

Australian Grape & Wine’s Pre-Budget Submission presents a range of options for the Australian Government to consider to help drive demand at home and abroad, to innovate in the vineyard and winery, and improve sustainability in the vineyard at a very challenging time for many growers and winemakers.

“The effective closure of the \$1.2 billion China market was an economic shock to our sector and has contributed directly to the picture painted by ABARES in its report” said Mr McLean. “As we note in our Pre-Budget Submission, the challenge for industry and government now is to work together to overcome the immediate hurdles while ensuring we invest in a more sustainable future.”

ABARES’ quarterly winegrape market report has been made possible by the Australian Government’s *Improving Market Transparency in Perishable Agricultural Good Industries* grants program, which enabled Australian Grape & Wine, the Inland Wine Regions Alliance and Wine Australia to collaborate with ABARES to help improve winegrape pricing information.

“This ABARES report is one of several responses to the recommendations that came from the ACCC Winegrape Market Study targeted to assisting growers understand how the market is performing so

(Continued on page 8)

Last Chance for Farms of the Future Ag Tech Grants

The Last face to face training day for the Riverina will be held on the 6th April and there are only a few positions left, if you would like to attend please contact Sarah Groat on 0400 331196 or sarah.groat@dpi.nsw.gov.au training may also be completed on line. These grants are aimed at Ag Tech purchases for your property to improve connectivity or boost productivity, Up to \$50,000 can be spent once the training and plans have been completed, this will consist of \$15,000 from the Participant plus a \$35,000 contribution from FotF.

Aim of the program

The expanded \$48 million Farms of the Future program launch aims to encourage primary producers to adopt and integrate technology into their farm business, which will allow them to boost their productivity, increase market competitiveness and improve resource management.

The Farms of the Future program is delivered and administered through the NSW Department of Primary

Industries, with funding from the Department of Regional NSW, through the Regional Digital Connectivity program.

The program is committed to working with regional communities, farmers and industries, enabling them to become more self-reliant and better prepared for the impacts of extreme weather events and other economic shocks.

How will the program run?

The Farms of the Future program has two core streams of investment:

Extension and Capacity Building: to develop and rollout a comprehensive Agtech training program, in partnership with Tocal Agricultural College, which will build industry capacity and increase farmer's digital confidence to use modern IoT, monitoring devices and other on-farm connectivity solutions.

More SWA Workshops Coming Up

Growers interested in attending an introduction to SWA (Sustainable Winegrapes Australia) course are asked to register their interest with Riverina Winegrape Growers on 6962 3944. These workshops are designed to give growers an overview of the sustainability program that we will see more and more wineries requiring in the future in order to access ex-

port markets. These work shops will be held in early May date TBC, the workshops take around 3 hours and attendees will receive a one off \$500 payment per entity, so come along and have a look, payment will not be available to entities that have already attended. Support workshops for those wanting to sign up will also be available and funded.

ABARES Report Highlights—Continued

they can make informed decisions during the season” said Mr McLean. “This independent reporting will help level the playing field for market information along the supply chain.”

Australian Grape & Wine, in collaboration with the In-land Wine Regions Alliance and regional grape and wine associations will use the forecast data to provide respective members with regular market insights and a greater perspective on grape pricing. It will complement other information available to our sector, including Wine Australia’s National Vintage Survey, which will be released in early July.



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